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By

SARAH · DOUDNEY·

G. Benjamin
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CHERRY AND CISSY WATCHING THE CHURCH-GOERS.

G. Benjamin
-1891-

UNDER FALSE COLOURS.

BY

SARAH DOUDNEY,

AUTHOR OF "WHEN WE TWO PARTED;" "A WOMAN'S GLORY;"
"MISS WILLOWBURN'S OFFER;" ETC.

WITH TWELVE FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS
BY G. G. KILBURNE.

NEW YORK
SCRIBNER AND WELFORD
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TO

HER GRACE THE DUCHESS OF WELLINGTON,

IN RECOGNITION OF

HER INTEREST IN GIRLS' LIVES,

AND WITH HER GRACE'S KIND PERMISSION,

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

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CONTENTS.

Chap.		Page
I.	"Upon a summer's eve,"	7
II.	Plotting,	19
III.	The Plot Prospers,	29
IV.	"Ye shall get gowns and ribbons meet,"	39
V.	"But there's no turning back,"	49
VI.	"She is not bred so dull but she can learn,"	61
VII.	Miss Dysart,	70
VIII.	"Her beauty made me glad,"	80
IX.	Tableaux,	89
X.	In the Long Gallery,	98
XI.	The Delectable Mountains,	107
XII.	"The star of that goodly company,"	117
XIII.	A Bitter Triumph,	127
XIV.	"How now! what news?"	137
XV.	"The weeping morn,"	145
XVI.	In Church Path,	153
XVII.	Wounded and Healed,	163
XVIII.	Uncle Barnaby,	173
XIX.	The Fourth Pupil,	182
XX.	Darkening Days,	194
XXI.	The Scape-goat,	203

CHAP. Page

XXII. "THOU ART SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR," 212

XXIII. BREAKING FREE, ... 221

XXIV. DRIFTING AWAY, ... 231

XXV. THE HAVEN, ... 239

XXVI. A BUSY NIGHT, ... 248

XXVII. VOICES, ... 260

XXVIII. IN LONDON AGAIN, ... 270

XXIX. THROUGH A SHOP WINDOW, ... 278

XXX. "THE BURDEN OF UNQUIET LIFE," 286

XXXI. "BUT IT APPEARS SHE LIVES," 294

XXXII. "WILL YOU BE RULED BY ME?" 302

XXXIII. "IS NOT THIS SOMETHING MORE THAN FANTASY?" . . 310

XXXIV. FOUND OUT, ... 322

XXXV. TWO WOMEN, ... 333

XXXVI. DISILLUSION, ... 343

XXXVII. TRIUMPH AND RESIGNATION, ... 351

XXXVIII. NEWS, ... 359

XXXIX. "AND THIS IS CISSY'S FRIEND," 367

XL. CONCLUSION, ... 378

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Page

Cherry and Cissy watching the Church-goers, ... *Frontis.*

Miss Effingham gives a Drawing-room Recitation, . . . 71

Arnold describes the Portraits to Cherry and Lady Rosanne, ... 102

Cherry performs the Tableau of the Old Oak Chest, . . 124

Arnold confesses his Love to Cherry, ... 132

She stooped and begged a Kiss from the little Fellow, . 170

Cherry makes a Startling Discovery, ... 217

Mr. Mornay finds Cherry in the Drifted Boat, ... 240

Uncle Barnaby visits his Niece, ... 263

Cherry's Secret revealed to Mr. Mornay, ... 304

Sir Reginald receives Cherry as his adopted Daughter, . 372

Cherry and Arnold meet once more, ... 382

UNDER FALSE COLOURS.

CHAPTER I

"UPON A SUMMER'S EVE."

IT was a Sunday evening in July, golden and still; bells were ringing for evensong, and two girls, sitting at one of the upper windows of Cedar House, were watching the people going to church. They could just get a distant glimpse of light summer gowns, flitting past the iron railings that divided the sloping lawn from the road; but Cherry Dent's grey eyes were keen and far-sighted, and let nothing escape them. The other girl took only a languid interest in the church-goers. She sat in an arm-chair with a cushion at her back, and was evidently an invalid.

The large, airy room was full of mellow sunlight. It contained two little white beds, and the walls were decorated with book-shelves, and some photographs and water-colour sketches in frames. A certain orderly primness

about the arrangements showed that it was a school bed-room; yet it looked cheerful and home-like, and seemed in this evening glow to be a very chamber of peace.

"What shall I do without you, Cherry, in the long Sunday evenings to come?" asked the sick girl with a sigh. "Just think how dull this old house will be when only Miss Noel and I are left here! And I might have had a glorious midsummer if I had been as well as other people."

"I wish I could stay with you, my dear;" said Cherry, with genuine feeling. "There is nothing self-sacrificing in the wish for *I* do not, by any means, anticipate a glorious midsummer. There are some pupils awaiting me at Alderport; highly respectable little girls already found for me by my energetic step-mother. It does not matter that I have no capacity for teaching;—it does not matter that I would rather make the children's frocks than cultivate their minds. I am not allowed to choose my own vocation. It has already been chosen for me by Uncle Barnaby Goodall."

"But why can't you be guided by your own inclinations?" inquired her friend. "Surely you are free to make frocks if you like!"

"Free!" cried Cherry, throwing up her hands with a pretty gesture of despair. "Do you forget that Uncle

Barnaby sent me here that I might become, as he says, 'a 'ighly eddicated young woman'? He wishes his poor sister's child to get her living in a genteel way; and he only knows of one genteel way. 'You must be 'ighly eddicated yourself, Cherry;' he remarked, 'and then you'll be able to eddicate others.' But it does not follow that I *am* able."

"No; it certainly does not follow." Cissy Dysart leaned back in her chair and laughed softly. "Do you remember the day when Miss Bowman fell ill, and you took her place? It was great fun to hear the third class worrying you about the equator, and the zodiac, and all those things which you ought to be able to explain with such perfect ease! I know you have crammed, and passed a really brilliant examination, my dear; and we all feel you are a credit to the college. But you have not the gift of imparting the knowledge you have acquired;—this is spoken like Miss Noel, is it not? Yet, Cherry, you are most thoroughly educated."

"'Ighly," said Cherry, gravely.

"It strikes me," the other continued, "that if I had strength enough to do anything in the world I would rather scrub floors than teach. In teaching, you have to explain certain things that you don't understand yourself and never will. This is dreadful; and it is more dreadful still to answer children's wonderful questions, and be quite

sure that your answers will be remembered against you when they are grown up."

"Worse than preaching sermons, Cissy?"

"Far worse. According to our experience, sermons do not attempt to answer any of the questions that children are sure to ask."

Then these two profound philosophers of eighteen were silent for a little while, and the bells filled up the pause.

"It is well for me," said the invalid at last, "that I have not got to earn my living in a genteel way, or in any other way. What would have become of me, I wonder, if I had chanced to belong to the working classes? How disgusted they would have been with a girl who was always fainting, and who could not even amuse herself in any natural, healthy fashion! I was born a delicate Indian baby, and I have developed into a sickly English school-girl. My father will be disappointed in me, I am afraid, when I am sent back to him. I hope he does not expect to see a blooming British beauty; Miss Noel and I have done all we can to prepare his mind. But some minds never will be prepared; and I can picture his dismay when he first beholds the feeble, emaciated ——."

"Don't, Cissy," interrupted Cherry, with quivering lips and tearful eyes. "No one can be disappointed in a girl as pretty as you are. And you will always be pretty,

dear, for yours is the kind of beauty that ill-health cannot take away."

Although this little speech sounded like a bit of loving flattery, it was a simple truth. We can all recall faces (and happily they are not rare) that have retained their purity of outline and charm of expression through years of sickness and pain. Cecilia Dysart had a clearly-cut face, oval in shape ; beautiful lips that smiled readily, and large blue eyes that prolonged the smile. At the first glance one saw that she was ill ; not merely delicate, but really ill. And looking at her more closely, one became aware that she accepted the fact of her illness with pleasantness and cheerful patience.

" You dear old Cherry," she said, with a well-pleased air, " there is nobody like you for putting me on good terms with myself. By the way, do you know that Miss Noel has actually begun to flatter me outrageously ? She says that I am wonderfully like your new portrait. Of course all the school used to see the resemblance between us, but I thought it had died out lately, did not you ?"

" No ; I did not think so," Cherry answered honestly. " We are always together, you see, and we grow more and more alike, and when I saw my own portrait, Cissy, I seemed to be looking at your face. As to your ways, and mode of speaking, my dear, I don't mind owning that I

have copied all that. You have been my pattern ever since I first came here."

Cissy Dysart smiled, but her eyes, too, were filled with tears.

"I always longed to be with some one who was really and truly a lady," Cherry went on. "You know I don't use the word lady in my honoured Uncle Barnaby's sense. It was not the birthright itself that I desired, it was the blessing that comes with the birthright. I pined for a knowledge of books and art; and I wanted,—oh, so much,—to be refined, and graceful with the grace of good breeding. Even as a child I could not be satisfied with the things around me. My step-mother often lectured me on the sin of discontent."

"She was wrong, Cherry."

"Not altogether wrong. Did not Miss Noel say one day that discontent was a virtue with a dark side, and a sin with a bright side? Now, I was quite unable to put my yearnings into sensible words, and so my step-mother only saw my dark side."

"I wonder if she would have understood you better if you had been her own child?"

"I don't know; very likely not. Her own child is perfectly easy to understand. Rhoda is a girl who would never puzzle any one; she is a placid little thing, without uncomfortable aspirations. I have not found her a sym-

pathetic soul, but we have always got on well together. My home in Alderport has never been really an unhappy one, you know; and I daresay it seemed hard to others that I was dissatisfied."

"I am afraid you will never get satisfied while you stay there. Everything is against you. It would be very difficult to make Mrs. Dent and Mr. Goodall give up their cherished plan. But they will have to give it up if you are to be a happy young woman," said Cissy, with decision.

"Yes; but I hate the thought of being ungrateful to Uncle Barnaby. He will feel that he has wasted his money on me. And his wife and daughter will be quite furious if I am not a governess; it is their fondest desire to make all their relations as genteel as themselves. They are so genteel, in fact, that they have forgotten that they ever lived over a shop, and are existing on the profits of their business at this very hour. I really believe they would like to do without all the things they used to sell, if that were possible. For instance, ham—Uncle Barnaby did a grand trade in hams; and Mrs. Goodall never has one on her table. She is afraid it might lead people's minds back to the past. Oh, it is an awful thing to be tied and bound by the chain of gentility!"

"Don't let yourself be tied and bound by any chain!" cried Cissy, laughing. "Only think what a good thing it is to have a special gift. Wasn't it the sage of Chelsea

who said—'Know what thou canst work at'? Most of his dark sayings are too deep for me, but I remember that."

"It is quite as important to know what one *can't* work at," said Cherry, thinking of her future pupils with a sigh.

There was another brief pause. The bells had ceased ringing, and the golden light had begun to wane a little. Cissy Dysart, with a musing look, was silently studying her friend's face.

It was a face that was worth studying. With the supreme charms of strength and youth was combined that pure chiselling of the features which outlasts the beauty of girlhood. The resemblance between the two friends was very striking; but Cherry was taller and more stately than her companion; and her eyes were not blue, like Cissy's, but deep grey, shaded by dark lashes. Cissy's hair, soft and wavy, was a light golden brown; but Cherry's plentiful tresses had a deeper colour and a stronger ripple. There was a great likeness in the expression of the two young faces; both wore in repose a look of thought; both were quickly awakened to sudden animation.

"Let me look at your portrait again, Cherry," said Cissy, abruptly breaking the silence. "There it stands on the mantelpiece in its pretty frame. I wonder what my father will say to it when he sees it in India!"

"Perhaps he will say that we ought to have been sisters," remarked Cherry, taking the picture from its place and handing it to her schoolfellow. Cissy looked at it long and earnestly.

"Yes," she said, "we ought to have been sisters. How did you come by my forehead and my nose,—and my mouth, too? You have stolen my features, and greatly improved them; in short, you are me very much beautified. I wish with all my heart that you could go to Heatherdown, and enjoy yourself in my stead!"

"Heatherdown! Why, I would give ten years of my life to go there!" exclaimed Cherry, rapturously clasping her hands. "Fancy the bliss of studying all those fashionable women in their lovely gowns, and storing up memories for the future! But if I were indeed Miss Dysart, Cissy, I should not care half as much about going to Heatherdown as I do now. It is the unattainable that we always long for. Besides, a Dysart would not want to study costumes, because she would not be born with a dressmaker's instincts, I suppose."

"Why not? A Bourbon was born with a locksmith's instincts."

"My opportunities of seeing really well-dressed people have not been very many," continued Cherry, regretfully. "And unless I am emancipated from Alderport bondage, I shall never come to the Royal Academy and the

Grosvenor Exhibition any more. Ah, Cissy, what a tantalizing vision of delight you have called up! One would not only study the gowns, but the women inside them. I have a theory that you must find out something of the inner woman before you can make a fitting costume for the outer one. The dressmaker of the future will possess a profound knowledge of human nature."

"If you are to be the dressmaker of the future you must have the necessary training," said Cissy, raising herself, and speaking with sudden animation. "My dear, I must contrive to send you to Heatherdown by fair means or foul."

"You have sent me there already in fancy, Cissy."

"That does not satisfy either of us. Listen; a glorious plan has just come into my head. You shall present yourself to the De Wiltons as Cissy Dysart!"

CHAPTER II.

PLOTTING.

"OH, Cissy!"

"Hush! Are you perfectly certain that no one is listening outside the door? But, of course not; Miss Grain has gone into the country for the day, and must be miles off. Only you remember the disastrous evening when she was supposed to be in church, and unexpectedly turned up in our corridor just when you were giving a beautiful and truthful description of her character. However, I think we are quite safe now."

Cedar House was as happy a home for girls as could be found in the kingdom; but even this educational paradise was not without its serpent. Miss Grain was the Lady Blanche of the College.

> "Too jealous, often fretful as the wind
> Pent in a crevice;"

always suspecting the pupils of hatching mysterious plots

against the commonweal, and sometimes irritating them into open rebellion. But on this Sunday evening the girls were indeed as safe as they fancied themselves to be. Now that there really was at last a wild and mischievous scheme about to be planned within the college walls, the ever-watchful Grain was far away. It was no unusual thing for Cherry to be Cissy's companion when the others were gone to church. Miss Noel was a mild ruler, and perhaps she was all the more indulgent because she saw that Cissy Dysart would not need indulgence long. Anyhow she could never find it in her heart to refuse the invalid's requests, and Cissy pleaded constantly for Cherry's company.

"There is no one listening," said Cherry, going to the door and opening it. "But you are not in earnest, dear? This idea of yours is only a joke?"

"I am very much in earnest indeed. And if I cannot carry out my design I shall be bitterly disappointed. But it must, and shall be, carried out; sit down, child, and pay attention."

"You *do* mean it, I see. Your eyes are quite eager. Oh, Cissy, you frighten me!"

"I shall frighten you still more before I have done. But now I will begin at the beginning. Yesterday, you know, I had Lady de Wilton's letter, asking me to spend my holidays at Heatherdown. She has been abroad for

years, wandering from one health resort to another, and that is why she has never seen me. And it is only a year ago that the old baronet died, and Sir Henry succeeded to the title."

"Lady Dysart and Lady de Wilton were great friends, were they not?"

"They were inseparable till marriage parted them. My mother went to India with her husband, and never saw her old companion again. But my father tells me in his letters that she often spoke of her friend Laura de Wilton. You see, Cherry, I was only a very little girl when I said goodbye to mamma; and she died soon after I left India. I am always wishing that I had known her better."

Cissy paused for a moment, and looked out at the dark foliage of the old cedars with dreamy eyes. What was she thinking of just then? Cherry did not know; she only felt that her schoolfellow's thoughts often took long flights over sea and land, and rested at last perhaps on a grave in India.

"Of course, Miss Noel believes that I shall decline the invitation," Cissy continued. "I am not well enough to go anywhere. I know only too well what a nuisance I should be in a great house full of gay people. But, instead of declining, I mean to accept it."

"Oh, you will not—you must not!" cried Cherry, imploringly.

"My dear, I am very obstinate, invalids always are. I shall accept the invitation, and, as Lady de Wilton asks for my portrait, I shall send yours."

"But why will you do these silly things?" exclaimed Cherry, wringing her hands in sheer desperation. "What good will it do to send my portrait? Later on the fraud will be found out."

"It can't be found out. You forget that this is to be my first and last visit to Heatherdown. I am to go back to India in the autumn. No, Cherry, we need not be afraid of detection; you may safely present yourself to Lady de Wilton as Miss Dysart, and enjoy yourself for five or six weeks. And you have only to tell your step-mother that you are going to stay for a time with your little dressmaking friend in South Molton Street. She never objects to your visiting Effie Comyn."

"I have promised to spend a week or two with Effie before I return to Alderport."

"Delightful. You will be supposed to be with her when you are at Heatherdown. And now there is something else to be considered—your wardrobe, as Miss Noel calls it. That can be very easily arranged, my dear, if you will listen to reason."

"I am listening, Cissy, just as I always do listen to your stories. This is a very interesting story indeed, and an impossible one."

"It is not impossible; it shall not be," replied Cissy, with calm determination "You will want some pretty gowns, you know, for Heatherdown. Well, there is the great box that came from India the other day; it is full of soft silks and lovely muslins, just fit for a young girl to wear."

"Just fit for Miss Dysart to wear. And she will wear them, I hope, some day."

An indescribable look came into Cissy's face for a moment, but it passed away quickly, and she spoke with the half-playful imperiousness which Cherry knew so well.

"I can't possibly wear them all," she declared; "and I am going to give some of them to you, as a parting gift, you know. You and Effie Comyn will make them up into costumes, which will be the envy of the De Wiltons' guests. Dear Cherry, what have I done to see such a stern countenance turned upon me? May I not have the pleasure of dressing my friend daintily?"

"You are too good to me," said Cherry, with misty eyes. "You know how well I like pretty things—almost too well, I am afraid. But I ought not to take them."

"Why not? Oh, don't tell me you are going to renounce all the pomps and vanities of this wicked world at eighteen! Wait till you are fifty, at least, before you begin to mortify the flesh. Does it not occur to you,

Cherry, that I want to enjoy myself by proxy? I really am not strong enough to dress, and go into society, and I want you to do it for me—just for this once. You must take my place at Heatherdown, and then I can see what I might have been if it had pleased heaven to make me a healthy girl instead of a sickly one."

"But you will be healthy soon, dear. You must have patience."

"I have—great patience," Cissy answered with a strange, swift smile. "Ah, Cherry, you must yield to my whim; my heart is set on it. You must go to the De Wiltons, and make conquests, and do all that I would have done if I had been as strong as you are."

"If I were sure that no mischief would come of it!" faltered Cherry.

"Mischief! Why, it is the most harmless little plot that ever was planned! Who will be any the worse for it? Certainly not the De Wiltons; they will get a beautiful, clever girl into their house, who will amuse them far better than I could have done."

"But I shall get into that house under a false name. They would not have me there if they knew me as Cherry Dent. In some way or other I shall suffer if I do this thing. Stolen waters are sweet; but the after-taste is bitter, Cissy."

"Nonsense; thousands have enjoyed their stolen waters

without being troubled with the bitter after-taste. Besides, if you go in for any kind of pleasure, you generally run some sort of risk. Don't you feel the very faintest inclination to carry out my plan, Cherry. You never were a hypocrite, my dear; confess that this scheme is perfectly enchanting!"

"Well, I do confess it. Even the fear of being found out would make it nicer, by adding to the excitement. And if once I were to launch my boat ——"

"You would ride triumphantly over the waves. Oh, Cherry, I have more confidence in you than you have in yourself! You are the very girl to shine in society. The people at Heatherdown will pet you immensely; and you will gain experience which will be very useful later on. I want you to yield to me, dear, and let me feel that I have made

'A lady of my own,'

and sent her out into my own set. It amuses me to think that I am going to overthrow all their theories, and prove that one need not be well-born in order to be perfectly well-bred. What a splendid joke it will be to take them all in!"

"But you won't undeceive them?" said Cherry, nervously.

"Have I not already told you that we shall never be found out? The joke will be purely for my own selfish

enjoyment, and you will have a good share of the fun. And now, from this very evening you will have to study your part. When we are alone I shall persistently address you as Miss Dysart and Cissy. You must forget Cherry; I wonder why they gave you that name?"

"Because they found it in the family Bible. It is a cow's name; not a girl's."

"I like it; it is quaint and sweet; but you mustn't remember it for a long time. Oh, how quickly this evening has slipped away. They will soon come home from church, and we have a great deal to settle yet."

"There is a fortnight before the holidays begin."

"Time enough for you to have your gowns made. To-morrow I will send a great parcel of silk and muslin to Effie Comyn, and on Tuesday afternoon I will get permission for you to go to South Molton Street and arrange about some costumes for me. Miss Noel always relaxes discipline in this warm weather, and Miss Bowman will be only too glad to go with you. Poor Bowman, I suspect she has a good reason for liking to take charge of the girls when they are shopping at the West End! And I suspect her all the more because she tries to hide her satisfaction from the lynx-eyed Grain. Ah, is that the hall-door bell?"

"I fancy it is," Cherry answered, listening to a faint peal.

"Then Grain has come back. Talk of a —— an angel and she is sure to appear. Cherry, don't sit there looking as if you had something on your mind. Make haste and get a book. You must be reading aloud in your best style when she comes in. Be quick, do, pray, be quick!"

Poor Cherry rushed to the nearest book-shelf and nervously grasped the first volume that came to hand. Then, opening it at random, she began to read in a high-pitched voice, ridiculously unlike her natural tone.

"But when the face of Sextus
Was seen among the foes,
A yell that rent the firmament
From all the town arose."

The door softly unclosed as she was finishing the fourth line, and Miss Grain's visage, flushed and sour, looked suddenly in upon the two girls.

"Macaulay's 'Lays of Ancient Rome' are hardly suitable for Sunday reading, Miss Dent," she said severely. "You might have chosen something less sanguinary and more soothing. In Miss Dysart's present state of health it is most injudicious to present warlike scenes to her imagination. You should have endeavoured to lead her thoughts away from earthly things, and there are books which would have assisted you. I could have lent you a lovely little work on 'Early Dissolution.'"

She shut the door, and they listened in silence to the sound of her retreating footsteps.

"Well," said Cissy, drawing a long breath, "I have often wondered what kind of face Sextus had, and now I know. He was exactly like Miss Grain."

"Do you think she had been listening long?" asked Cherry, anxiously. "The ring that we heard might have been someone else's. Oh, I hope she has not a vague suspicion of a plot!"

"You may be quite sure that she has," replied Cissy, equably. "She could not live without vague suspicions. However, it is wise to be on our guard, so don't mention the word plot again; it has an ugly sound, you know. And put Macaulay away, for it is just possible that false Sextus may come back!"

CHAPTER III.

THE PLOT PROSPERS.

WHEN Cherry woke on Monday morning the first thing that came into her head was Cissy's wonderful scheme.

Cissy herself was still asleep in the other little white bed, and her friend moved softly about the room for fear of waking her. It was a brilliant day; scarcely a breath of wind stirred the velvety green of the dark old cedar boughs; and as Cherry looked out upon the quiet lawn she sighed heavily. These July days, passing so quickly by, were the very last days of her school-life. She might come back sometimes to this dear prim old place, but it would be as a visitor, not as a pupil.

Cissy, too, was going—going so far away that there was little hope of reunion. These two, who had loved each other with a firmer and stronger love than schoolfellows often know, were to be parted for ever.

Standing at the window, and leaning out to feel the

warm air of the summer morning, Cherry Dent recalled her first day at Cedar House, and the fair, blue-eyed girl who had extended the right hand of fellowship to the shy newcomer. Cissy had been kind without being gushing, and had known how to protect without patronizing. And even Cherry herself hardly realized all that she owed to Cissy Dysart's timely notice and support; but she did know that from that first day there had never been one broken link in the chain that bound the friends together.

Miss Noel had watched the friendship with a great deal of interest, and had let the girls share the same room. She saw that they resembled each other and helped each other in no common way; and as time went on she found that they had both crept very close to her heart. It was a kind heart, less hardened by disappointment and ingratitude than might have been expected; and although she had been deceived often enough, she had never fallen into the evil habit of suspecting everybody. She knew all about Cherry Dent, and the excellent intentions of Uncle Barnaby, but was privately convinced that Cherry could never be made into a governess.

Cedar House stood in one of the quietest roads in Kensington. It was an old-fashioned house which had been altered and enlarged to suit the requirements of a school; but no changes had been made in the shady lawn in front and the sweet old garden at the back; and even

indoors there was something quaint and homely which always connected it with the past. To Cherry it seemed the truest home that she had ever known. Everything here was refined; she could never be out of humour with her surroundings; even when she felt disposed to chafe against the rules, and sigh for a wider scope, her heart always clung to the college and its formal old ways. Holidays were never welcome because they took her back to Alderport, and of all places in the world Alderport was, in Cherry's eyes, the most undesirable.

She was still in a reverie when Cissy woke, and feebly asked what time it was. And as Cherry turned to answer the question, her spirit sank within her; Cissy's face, lying there on the pillow, looked sadly wan and wasted in the morning light. She had known for a long while that her friend was very fragile; but, with girlish hopefulness, she had constantly looked forward to a day when Cissy would be quite well. But what if that day should never come? At this moment it seemed farther off than ever.

"Don't you mean to dress?" demanded the invalid, with a smile that was as merry and sweet as ever. "Dear dawdling, dallying dreamer, why do you pace the room in scanty attire? You are generally the first to wake, and the last to go down stairs. But do not be late this morning. Make your appearance in due time at the

convivial repast; a great deal depends upon your good behaviour."

"Some of the girls envy you;" said Cherry, beginning to bestir herself. "They think it is a fine thing to have a dainty breakfast brought up to one's room."

"Do they? I can assure them that it is a much finer thing to sit down at the long narrow table with a good appetite, and chatter bad French. How beautiful your hair is, Cherry! I like the rich reddish tinge it takes in the sun. Now that I have lent you my name I feel quite proud of you; you are to enjoy all the pleasures that I have missed, Cherry, and win all the hearts that I might have won!"

Still harping upon her scheme. The plan had not passed away with the dreams of the night; it was present with her this morning, brighter and clearer than ever; it was a new interest in the monotonous young life. And Cherry, in her romantic affection, inwardly vowed that her friend should not be disappointed.

There was such a malicious twinkle in Miss Grain's eye when Cherry went to her seat at the breakfast table, that the girl began to fear the worst. But it was one of Miss Grain's favourite tricks to intimidate a pupil by looking as if she knew something to her disadvantage. Like Barnaby Rudge's raven, she would turn her head from side to side, and regard her victim with a furtive and

sparkling glance. Conscious of secret designs, Cherry grew very uncomfortable under this scrutiny, and displayed less appetite than usual, and no desire for French conversation.

"Come to me in the library, Miss Dent," said Miss Noel, as they all rose from the table.

Again did Cherry quake. Miss Grain had been saying something, and Miss Noel was going to ask searching questions. But it is only the unexpected that ever happens; and instead of making any disagreeable remarks the good woman received Cherry with a benevolent smile.

"You are not looking quite as well as usual, my dear," she said. "Perhaps you are a little too anxious about Miss Dysart's health. Is that the case?"

"I—I do not think her any better to-day," replied Cherry, falteringly.

"Well, well, we must not be disheartened; this warm weather is trying,—very trying. Miss Dysart says she wants you to see your dressmakers about her costumes. Suppose you go to the West End this afternoon, my dear. William shall go, too, and carry the parcel; and I daresay Miss Bowman will be glad to accompany you."

So the path was to be made smooth for the girls and their plans! Cherry thanked Miss Noel demurely, and went off to her class-room with a lighter heart.

A little later, Cissy Dysart came down stairs, and took her usual place among the elder pupils. She was in such good spirits, and looked so bright, that there did not seem to be any cause for great anxiety. Miss Grain heard of the afternoon arrangements with an ominous shake of the head; and Miss Bowman, a lively brunette of three-and-twenty, did her best to appear indifferent, and succeeded very badly. As to the other girls, they had somehow got hold of a vague notion that Miss Bowman and Cherry were going out on a glorious shopping expedition, and their hearts burned within them with envy.

The maidens of Cedar House were not consumed with the thirst for learning. They were damsels of the old-fashioned type, much given to outward adorning, and deeply interested in the latest fashions.

"It is all quite right," Cissy Dysart had said one day, when Miss Grain had been lamenting this universal love of putting on of apparel. And then she went on to declare that a young woman who did not care for being well dressed, was simply a disgrace to her sex.

"It would be a splendid thing," she continued, "to have a costume class. It does not do to leave a girl too much to her own instincts. When she escapes from control, she is apt to run riot in beds of artificial flowers, and become a truly hideous sight with feathers and trimmings. She ought to be taught how to dress. She should learn

to restrain her barbaric desires for plumes and gorgeous colours. I see you don't agree with me, Miss Grain."

There was no one in the school who dared to speak her mind as freely as Cissy did. In every community there is sure to be an outspoken member, who gradually becomes the mouth-piece of the rest. And Cissy Dysart was a girl who would not take any undue advantage of her invalid privileges, but considered other girls, and was always ready to come to the aid of the misunderstood. And so it came to pass that no one was jealous of her although she was openly indulged, and no one disliked her but Miss Grain.

Miss Grain was a person utterly devoid of all sense of humour, and could not understand Cissy's gaiety of heart. And when she could not understand a thing she always denounced it as sinful. That so fragile a girl should dare to enjoy herself seemed quite terrible to Miss Grain. She persisted in regarding Cissy as one who danced audaciously on the verge of a precipice. And Cissy, out of a pure delight in astonishing her, danced the more.

When Miss Grain disliked people it was her way to manifest an extraordinary interest in their spiritual concerns. And so deep-rooted was her belief in herself and her own excellence, that she never once suspected her own motives. She really thought it was a sense of duty which prompted her continually to remind Cissy that life was

short, and that delicate people could not be expected to live long. She divined that the two friends had been laughing at her, and calling her Sextus on Sunday evening. And this was why, when they went upstairs after their early dinner, they found certain additions to the decorations on their walls. Denunciatory texts, written in a bold, black hand, were pinned up here and there with startling effect. For her own part, Cherry cared for none of these things; but for Cissy's sake they kindled her into sudden passion.

"Cherry, Cherry;" called out Miss Dysart imploringly. But all in vain. The girl's angry hands had torn down the texts in a moment, and she went flying out of the room and through the corridors to carry them to Miss Noel.

When she came back, hot and breathless, there was a look of triumph on her face that made Cissy shake her head despondingly.

"I know what you have done, Cherry," she said. "I know Miss Noel is annoyed, and will speak her mind to Miss Grain; but will that do any good? No one can shake Grain's confidence in herself; she will never see that she is wrong, and she will become your determined enemy for the future."

"I don't care a straw about her enmity!" cried Cherry.

Again Cissy shook her head. But Cherry only laughed, and kissed her, and ran off downstairs into the hall. William, the page, was waiting there with the parcel under his arm, and Miss Bowman shortly appeared.

Miss Grain, glancing out of a convenient window, saw the pair setting off together, and severely disapproved of Miss Bowman's bonnet. The younger teacher had a very becoming flush on her brown cheeks, and a happy light in her eyes. What was she going to do with herself while Cherry Dent was with the dressmakers? Miss Grain felt that she should like to have her "watched" by some of the people from a private inquiry office. There was a foolish trustfulness in Miss Noel's nature which Miss Grain frequently lamented. And yet the college went on quite as well as if it had been governed by a suspicious head; nothing dreadful had ever happened; no wolf in sheep's clothing had ever set foot in this fortunate fold. There had been the usual shortcomings and falsities common to girlhood, but nothing worse.

It certainly was a delightful thing to escape from the formal old house, and go to the West End that sunny day. The two young women and William got out of their omnibus in Oxford Street, and made straight for Marshall & Snelgrove's windows before they did anything else. Men have no idea how girls feel when they look at beautiful stuffs arranged in artistic folds. Their baser minds cannot

comprehend the rapture produced by filmy laces and silks in divers delicate shades. But Miss Bowman was the first to tear herself away from this show.

"I am to leave you at the dressmakers' door, and send William home;" she said demurely. "And I am to call for you in an hour, Miss Dent."

Yes, Miss Bowman. Are you sure you won't come sooner?" inquired Cherry, gravely. 'I daresay I shall have settled everything with Miss Comyn in half an hour."

"Pray do not hurry yourself," replied the considerate teacher. "An hour is the time allowed by Miss Noel."

There was a twinkle of fun in the grey eyes as they met the dark ones. Miss Bowman's colour rose a shade higher, but she maintained her dignity, and accompanied her charge to South Molton Street in discreet silence.

CHAPTER IV.

"YE SHALL GET GOWNS AND RIBBONS MEET."

MISSES HALE & COMYN, dressmakers, were people who did a good deal of respectable business with very little noise. They occupied the upper part of a house in the middle of the street, and their names were to be read on a brass plate on one of the pillars of the door. They had a bell, all to themselves, close to the plate; but there were two other bells, and if you chanced to ring the wrong one you were confronted either by the bald-headed man in the front parlour, or the bushy-headed man in the back. It has been said, often enough, that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives; but in London you may go farther still, and say that one half of a household does not know how the other half lives. And if you had asked close questions about the occupations of those two men, neither Miss Hale nor Miss Comyn could have given you a satisfactory answer.

South Molton Street is not by any means an attractive street, but it is an excellent spot for dressmakers to live in. Everything necessary to their business is within easy reach; and ladies coming in omnibuses from the suburbs can visit them with the greatest possible ease and comfort. The firm of Hale & Comyn were content with humble appearances. There was no attempt at grandeur in their establishment. You entered a dark passage, and followed your conductress up a narrow staircase to a door on the first landing; and then you were ushered into a very plainly-furnished reception room.

But unpretentious as the room was, you found in it unmistakable evidences of culture and refinement. In the first place there were books in shelves upon the walls, and if you had curiosity enough to examine their titles you would see that they were works by good authors. Then there were photographs in frames of plain oak, shadows of great pictures, and bits of old abbeys and castles that had stories lingering about them. And on a round table, in a corner near a window, there were plants that made some effort to flourish, even in the stinted sunshine of South Molton Street.

On working-days the table in the middle of the room was covered with fashion-plates; and the sofa was generally occupied by a newly-finished gown that looked as if a body had only just slipped out of it. But on Sun-

days this little parlour wore quite a different aspect; for then all signs of dressmaking were put out of sight, not because there was anything sinful in such signs appearing on a Sunday, but because all busy workers should hide their work from their own eyes if they want rest.

Cherry Dent had been into this room many times; and, strange as it may seem, she found it an attractive place. And this must have been because the women who lived here were earning their bread in the way that she liked best. Those who earnestly desire to follow a trade are apt to love the very sight of its tools. Cherry loved needles and thread, and silks and stuffs, and costumes finished and unfinished. And she felt that she should like to live in this unlovely street with Effie Comyn, and go to work with all her might.

Effie Comyn was ten years older than Cherry, and their acquaintance had first begun in Alderport, where Effie, fresh from Scotland, had found a situation. But Effie's gifts deserved a larger scope, and she soon left Alderport for London, carrying with her a strong affection for Cherry Dent. The friends corresponded regularly, and when Cherry went to Kensington she obtained leave to go and see Effie in South Molton Street.

All the girls at Cedar House had heard of the dressmaking firm; but they did not know that Effie and Cherry were intimate friends. Miss Noel knew all about it; but

she permitted Cherry to visit Miss Comyn sometimes, having first satisfied herself that the young woman was exceedingly quiet and refined. She went occasionally to South Molton Street herself, and ordered dresses to be made; and some of her elder pupils followed her example, so that the firm might be said to enjoy the patronage of the college.

For a minute or two Cherry waited in the reception-room, and examined the gown on the sofa with critical eyes. And then the door opened, and Effie came in.

"Good day, Miss Dent," she began; but seeing that her visitor was alone, she said "my dear Cherry," and ran up to her and kissed her.

Effie Comyn was small and neat of figure. She had flaxen hair, soft and frizzy, which made her head look like a doll's head. But it was by no means a doll's face that was uplifted to Cherry. The light-blue eyes were shrewd as well as kind, and the mouth, although not thin-lipped, was firm. She was a nice-looking woman without being quite a pretty one, and her smile was sunny enough to make any face beautiful.

"You did not write to say that you were coming, my dear," she said. "And you have a big parcel, I see. We are still very busy, but if there is anything important ——"

"Just open the parcel, Effie. It is full of Indian things that Miss Dysart has sent. Are they not lovely?"

A little note dropped out of the delicate folds of silk, and Effie saw that it was addressed to herself. She opened it and read it in silence; but when she had finished there were tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Cherry, what a friend Miss Dysart is!" she said, with a sigh. "She does not seem to think about herself at all. Here are yards and yards of material, and nearly all of it is for you. When I have leisure I am to make her a morning wrapper; but she tells me to set to work on your costumes at once. What will you do with such dainty things, my child? Can they be worn in Alderport?"

"They would be quite wasted there;" Cherry answered, wondering what Effie would say if she were taken into the confidence of the plotters.

Miss Comyn looked up with inquiring eyes, and detected signs of embarrassment. If Cherry had a secret, Effie was not the woman to draw it out of her against her will; so she turned back to the parcel.

"Here is something that may be worn anywhere," she remarked, taking hold of some soft grey cashmere. "We had better begin with this, and you shall tell me how to make it up."

They plunged at once into all the mysteries of draping and trimming, and the fate of the grey cashmere was soon decided. And then Effie, with a puzzled look in her face, referred once more to the letter.

"Miss Dysart tells me," she said, hesitatingly, "that I am to spend all my skill on these Indian silks, and make them into dinner dresses. And there are to be two ball dresses, Cherry."

"Yes." Cherry's cheeks were burning. "The fact is, Effie, I am going to stay with some friends of Cissy's. She is very anxious for me to go to them; but I feel—in short I don't think a girl in my position ought to visit such people."

"Why not, if they want to know you?" Effie asked. "You ought not, I am sure, to reject any of Miss Dysart's kindness. She has no friend, she says, so dear as you are, and she wishes to treat you as if you were her sister. She is rich, and she loves to make you presents. It is not at all surprising that she should like you to be acquainted with her friends."

Cherry was silent, and stood with downcast eyes.

"There is something very touching in this girl's love for you;" Effie Comyn went on. "She is the only one in the college who knows that you are of lower birth than your schoolfellows. When Miss Noel consented to receive you, she, of course, was told everything, and she has acted for three years with perfect wisdom and kindness. She requested you, from the first, to make no confidantes; and before you confided in Miss Dysart you asked Miss Noel's leave."

"That is quite true, Effie. And she knew that Cissy was not like other girls; she has always been very wise and womanly in all her ways."

"Well, you gave Miss Dysart your entire trust, and she has proved herself worthy of that trust. It seems to me that you are the chief interest in her life. Do not disappoint her in anything; let her be happy in seeing you happy. You really want to stay with these people you speak of? You are looking forward with pleasure to the visit?"

"Yes."

"As to Mrs. Dent, she will not object. She gave you leave, you know, to stay with me before you returned to Alderport."

"And I should like to spend a few days with you, Effie, when I leave Cedar House."

"I shall be very glad to have you here, my dear. I only wish that I could keep you always."

At these words, Cherry suddenly and irrationally burst into tears.

"I am going to be miserable, Effie," she sobbed. "Mrs. Dent has found some pupils for me, and I can't teach them. And if I don't teach, Uncle Barnaby will say that I have cheated him out of a first-rate education. If I could come and live with you and make dresses, I should be perfectly, perfectly happy."

"Don't be a baby, Cherry," said Miss Comyn, gently patting her on the shoulder. "You are a woman now, and you must take your life into your own hands. If you are indeed certain that you cannot teach, why then, my child, there is only one thing to be done. You must come here and make dresses with me, and you must pay your uncle back by instalments. Miss Hale will be married at Christmas, and you would be everything that I want. Other girls have to be taught dressmaking, and learn it slowly and painfully sometimes; but you know it all by instinct."

"I am so fond of it," sighed Cherry. "You don't know what it costs me to let the girls' bodices alone when I see them fitting badly. And their skirts,—oh, how I long to take out the stitches, and loop them up afresh here and there! I am always making up costumes in imagination. As to the women in my favourite books I never fail to dress them to my own taste. But you must have noticed, Effie, that the best novelists tell you what their heroines wore. Scott is delightfully precise. There was Catherine Seyton, you know; when Roland Graeme first saw her she had on a close jacket ——"

"If you are going to multiply instances, my dear, we shall never get our business settled this evening. Your hour is nearly gone," said Effie.

"Nearly gone! It seems as if I had only been here

five minutes. Well, Effie, there really is not much left to say; but it will be best to put all these silks and muslins out of sight before Miss Bowman comes. I don't wish her to know that Miss Dysart is so generous to me. And when the costumes are finished, do not send them to Cedar House. Keep them here till I come to stay with you."

"That will be a good arrangement," said Effie, thoughtfully. "It would not be wise to display your new gowns to the whole college, and let every one know you are dressed by Miss Dysart's bounty."

"She would not even wish Miss Noel to know. I will come straight to you, Effie, when the school breaks up. Naturally I shall be low-spirited when I say good-bye to the dear old place."

"You must not carry low spirits to Miss Dysart's friends. It will be well for you to start from this house when you go to them, Cherry. Then I shall see that everything is in perfect order, and pack the dresses with my own hands."

So ended this important conference, and it seemed to Cherry Dent that the stars in their courses were fighting for the success of the plot. Nor is it seldom that our way is made quite clear for us when we are going to do something which is decidedly wrong. The path that leads to the forbidden fruit and the stolen waters is

often easy enough; it is the return which is difficult and dangerous.

When Miss Bowman arrived, with cheeks brighter than ever, she found Cherry waiting composedly in the dressmaker's parlour. Effie had decamped at the sound of the door bell, carrying the parcel with her.

"We shall not make many more journeys to the West End together," said the pretty teacher, regretfully, as they were going homeward. "When you and Miss Dysart are gone, the college will be very dull. You are the two eldest pupils, and the younger girls do not often go to the dressmakers'."

CHAPTER V.

"BUT THERE'S NO TURNING BACK."

THE last day at the college was nearly over; all the trunks were packed, and all the girls were ready to go their respective ways in the morning. All, save Cissy Dysart, who was to remain under Miss Noel's care, and be nursed, if possible, back to health and strength.

This was nothing new to Cissy, who had lived three years at Cedar House. At five years old she had left India, and had been entrusted to an uncle at Vienna; and it was not until his wife died that she was sent to England to Miss Noel. At fifteen Cissy had somewhat awed her schoolfellows; she had come among them, not as a girl of their own stamp, but as a graceful little woman of the world, with manners fit for a young princess. But it was not a worldly heart that beat in Miss Dysart's bosom, and it had opened at once to the grave and timid Cherry Dent. For in those first days of school life, Cherry had

been grave and timid, afraid of being laughed at, and looked down upon.

Sir Reginald Dysart was a great Indian magnate, whose interests were entirely wrapped up in the land of his adoption. In money matters he was a model father, lavishly supplying his young daughter with funds, and sending wonderful presents of silks and jewellery; but to Cissy he had always seemed more like some benevolent king in a fairy tale than a real father of flesh and blood. He was so very far away, and her remembrance of him was so dim, that even his letters did not bring him quite near to her. She had not many people to love, this fair dainty Cissy, who was secretly envied by her companions; and somehow she had always seemed to stand aloof from every one save Cherry.

All the packing was done, and the two friends sat together by the chamber window that overlooked the lawn. The sun was going down in splendour, touching the old cedars with stray gleams of glory, and the scent of roses came up faintly sweet. There were old-fashioned white roses growing in great abundance in the shrubbery at Cedar House, and long afterwards the sight and scent of them recalled to Cherry that last evening in the school bed-room, and the last talk in the sunset with Cissy Dysart.

"You must write to me often while you are at Heather-

down," said Cissy, earnestly. "And you must contrive to post the letters without being seen. Long letters, please. Let all the sayings and doings be duly chronicled; don't leave out a single pretty speech, and never be afraid of being thought vain. Remember that you are *me*."

"I will do all that you wish. But oh, Cissy!" The girl had risen from her seat and was kneeling at Miss Dysart's side. "I wish our plan could be undone. Is it too late?"

"Of course it is too late. Right or wrong, you must go on now. And if there is any mischief coming I will take the blame; no one shall be hard on you. It is all my fault; the plot is mine, and I have insisted on carrying it out. But, Cherry, I am certain that everything will go off splendidly; it is quite mean of you to be afraid."

"I will not be afraid. Only don't let us talk of it any more to-night."

Cissy understood her, and was silent. She stooped, and pushed the wavy hair away from her schoolfellow's forehead, and kissed her.

"I am very fond of you, Cherry," she said at last. "If men say that women are not capable of true friendship, never believe them. You are so necessary to me, my dear, that I do not want to go to India without you."

"But I can't go with you, Cissy."

"No; but I may send for you after I get there. What do you say, Cherry? Would you be willing to go eastward ho?"

"I think I would go anywhere to find you."

The talk of girl-friends is often highflown and impulsive, but these words came straight from the heart.

"Perhaps I shall ask you to come, dear," said Cissy. "And perhaps——you may have to take a still longer journey before you can find me!"

Cherry lifted her tearful face from her friend's bosom, and looked at her with a gaze of agonized inquiry. But Cissy kissed her again, and reassured her with a smile.

"Cheer up, Cherry," she said brightly. "We shall meet again in the end, even if we are parted for years. And we shall always keep the old love in our hearts, through all life's changes, shall we not? We are sisters, dear, and our souls will cling together for ever and ever."

The final step was taken. Effie Comyn, suspecting nothing, and attributing Cherry's unusual quietness to the nervousness of a schoolgirl going among strangers, had carefully packed the boxes with her own hands. The luggage was in the van, and Cherry Dent was in a first-class carriage, looking out dreamily on villages and fields, and seeing nothing at all. She was overwhelmed with the miserable consciousness of being a dreadful humbug, flying

along at railroad speed to impose upon unsuspecting people. It was more than likely that an accident would happen to the train that carried such a base impostor. In fact she almost wished that something *would* happen,—something that would send her back to London, and put an end altogether to this wild scheme.

An old gentleman, sitting in another corner of the carriage, glanced at her once or twice over the top of his newspaper; and she wondered whether he could read falseness in her face? What he did see was a beautiful girl, dressed in a costume of grey tweed which (although it had not been "built" by the celebrated Cowes tailor) was a perfect fit. She was so young, and the outlines of her face were so soft, that he was sorry to notice a slight knitting of her dark eyebrows. If he could have spoken without startling her he would have said—"Take care, my dear; nothing is more easily acquired in early life than a frown, and nothing is more difficult to get rid of!" But of course he preserved a respectful silence, and only looked at her when he was quite sure of being unobserved.

More meadows and farms,—thatched cottages smothered with flowers,—rich woods, and glimpses of silver streams. How beautiful it all was! Cherry began to rouse herself, and take an interest in the scenery.

And then she recalled all that she had often heard and read of the beauty of Heatherdown, and remembered the

pictures that she had seen of the place. Like all romantic girls she had always cherished an intense desire to be a guest in one of the historical homes of England; and nothing delighted her more than the idea of going to sleep in a real old tapestried chamber. She had no objection even to a ghost or two. Anything that was connected with the traditions of the past, anything that was as unlike her ordinary experiences as it could possibly be, would be welcomed by Cherry. And now the wish was to be fulfilled at last, and she must try to forget that it was not fulfilled in a lawful way.

It was only a short journey. For Cissy's sake, if not for her own, she must pluck up courage and bear herself as a Miss Dysart should. After all, what was there so very dreadful in masquerading, if one had no evil designs? She was not going to do any mischief to the De Wiltons; all that she wanted was to stay in their house, and mix, on equal terms, with the people who were gathered there. Cherry was not a resolute young woman at heart, but the time had come for her to trample on her fears.

When she found herself actually seated in a brougham, driving away from the little railway station, her spirit rose to the occasion.

The time was five o'clock in the afternoon, and only the sound of the carriage-wheels broke the profound stillness of the country road. The air was sweet with the

scent of honeysuckle that flung a profusion of blossoms over the hedges. Everywhere there was an affluence of foliage, but no stir of leaf-hidden birds; no sign of life; all was quiet with the warm languor of late July. It was a relief to Cherry when a turn in the road brought them to a brown pool that lay by the hedge-side, where a big, lazy horse was stopping to drink. A man, big and lazy too, was taking charge of the horse, and made a clumsy gesture of salutation as the carriage passed by.

Then came the park gate, and another long road, much better kept, and more monotonous than the way they had left behind. At last there was a sombre avenue, which the sunbeams scarcely dared to penetrate, and broke up into millions of bright fragments that gilded the solemn trees here and there. At the end of this dark vista appeared the house.

As Cherry sat up in the carriage and looked out, she seemed to have a vague remembrance of the place, and began to fancy that she had seen that vast grey mansion in her dreams. We all have haunts that are only visited in the slumber-world; dim chambers where we meet the faces that have gone out of our daily life; dusky gardens where lost friends walk with us side by side. Cherry was too young to have a past; and yet she had hardly decided whether her knowledge of Heatherdown was real or visionary, when the carriage stopped at the door.

A hundred times on her journey she had tried to picture her meeting with the De Wiltons, and now the hour was really come. But it was not a very trying ordeal after all. She had only to respond quietly to the gentle greetings of a tall, faded woman and a stout, grey-haired man. The lady kissed her, and said she was very much like her mother, and the gentleman gave her a benign smile of welcome. And then she was conducted up a grand old staircase, and along a tapestried passage to her bed-room.

Here indeed she might breathe freely. The oriel window admitted a view of purple summer hills, and far-stretching woodland; and here and there a break in the trees showed glimpses of the full wealth of golden fields. What would she not give for a long walk to those hills whose beauty and mystery overwhelmed her? They made her think of the Delectable Mountains, and of the wonderful things that the shepherds showed the pilgrims.

It was now six o'clock, and the dinner hour was half-past seven. Even the lovely view from the window could not entirely banish the consciousness of hunger, and the longing for that truly feminine solace, a cup of tea. But Cherry soon discovered that no one was ever allowed to lack anything in this luxurious household, and presently a maid-servant appeared with the desired refreshment. Then came the important business of dressing, and she set to work (having declined all assistance), determined

to look her very best, and be a worthy representative of the Dysarts.

The toilette was soon finished, but Cherry gazed at herself with considerable diffidence. Not even the remembrance of Cissy's frank admiration and Effie Comyn's reassuring words could make her quite sure of her own appearance. She could not see herself as others saw her, and so had small faith in her milk-white skin, and shining waves of hair. But if she had slight confidence in her charms, she was perfectly certain that her gown was a success. Only artistic hands could have arranged those soft folds of cream and crimson silk so deftly, and have disposed that foam of lace about the neck and shoulders with such good effect. She left her bed-room, and passed through the dim corridor again, and down to the drawing-room.

There were several women in the room, but no one's looks depreciated her. Lady de Wilton drew the girl to her side at once, and began to talk to her about the school-life that had just come to an end; and Cherry answered all her questions with an easy candour which was most astonishing to herself.

She had leisure to look round and study the guests before the dinner-gong sounded. One of them, Lady Rosanne Archdale, was sitting in a low chair near Cherry's seat, and it was clear that their hostess had

reckoned on an intimacy between these two. A cousin of Lady Rosanne's had been a pupil at Cedar House four or five years ago, and Lady Rosanne had called at the college several times. She remembered Miss Noel perfectly, and thought that Miss Dysart must be really sorry to leave her.

This slender thread of association was quite strong enough to draw Cherry towards her new acquaintance. Moreover, Lady Rosanne was one of the prettiest little creatures in the world; and there was something so brilliant in her beauty that she scarcely had need of the few jewels she wore,—being herself such a sparkling gem. What great lustrous brown eyes she had, and how kindly she talked to the tall schoolgirl!

"Have you ever seen Miss Effingham act?" she asked, when they had exhausted school topics. "I suppose Miss Noel seldom allowed you to go to the theatre?"

"I have only been once;" Cherry answered. "And I have never seen Miss Effingham, although of course I envied all the girls who had seen her."

"Then you will be glad to know that she is staying here for two days, and you will hear her recite after dinner."

"I did not expect such a pleasure," said Cherry with irrepressible delight. And then a little ashamed of her

enthusiasm, she added frankly, "I have lived a sort of nun's life, you know, and everything outside the college is fresh to me."

"It is very pleasant to meet any one who has not exhausted all pleasures," remarked Lady Rosanne in a caressing tone. "I am quite tired of bored people; they are really too depressing. But even the most weary of worldlings shows a little interest in Miss Effingham. She is a woman who lays one under a spell."

"Is she in the room now?" Cherry asked in a low voice.

"She is standing over there by the window, talking to Mr. de Wilton."

Cherry followed the guiding glance, and saw a tall willowy woman whose figure was defined against a rich background of sunset sky. She wore a faintly-coloured gown that was neither blue nor grey, and was fashioned like no other costume in the room. There were two or three rows of pearls round her white throat, and a cluster of large yellow roses was loosely fastened at her bosom. Her hair, cut short, was fair and dishevelled, and her pale face, a little worn and faded, was so spiritual and delicate that almost all the other faces seemed coarse beside it. She was like a dream of a fair woman, and seemed to have come straight from that dim wood where the poet

met so many beautiful phantoms. And while Cherry was regarding her with a fixed gaze, and Lady Rosanne was watching Cherry with quiet amusement, the butler appeared, and they all went in to dinner.

CHAPTER VI.

"SHE IS NOT BRED SO DULL BUT SHE CAN LEARN."

IT was Mr. de Wilton who took Cherry in to dinner; but the girl was so fully occupied with her new surroundings that she scarcely looked at him. She could see the actress's pale face above the rich flowers on the table, and was listening for the tones of her voice among all the other voices, when the man at her side began to talk.

"Town will soon be empty enough," he remarked. "Does not the country feel delightful after all the noise and heat up there?"

"There was very little noise in our Kensington road," she answered simply; "and our garden was always cool and shady, even on the hottest days."

"I was forgetting," he said, "that you are not yet of the world, worldly. My aunt tells me that you are to be snatched away from England before you have seen anything of English society. It is really too bad; I

think Sir Reginald ought to let us keep you here for twelve months at least before you return to him."

He was quite in earnest at that moment, although he would have made the same pretty speech to a far plainer girl in similar circumstances. Lady de Wilton had displayed the portrait that was enclosed in Cissy's letter, and he had liked it well enough to take possession of it with cool audacity. It was a great relief to find that the girl was as handsome as her picture. The photographers of the present day possess the art of beautifying plain faces to an extent that is hardly fair; and Arnold de Wilton, (who was an honest lover of beauty,) was glad to find that here was no delusion. And, being an honest lover of books also, it is no wonder that he recalled the portrait with the old sweet words of Bassanio:—

"So far this shadow
Doth limp behind the substance."

His words sent the blood rushing to Cherry's cheeks, and thrilled her with a sense of unspeakable shame. She ought to have been prepared for this reference to her supposed father; but, for an hour past, things had been running so smoothly that she had half forgotten what a fraud she was. And then came the consciousness that it was impossible to escape from this false position without compromising Cissy, the originator of the plot. She had

begun to play her part, and she must play it out to the bitter end.

"I shall be sorry to leave England," she said in rather an unsteady voice.

In an instant De Wilton's quick sympathies came to her aid. This girl, he thought, had a heart, and had learnt to love her teachers and schoolfellows. Of course it would be hard for her to leave them, and go to an unknown father in a strange land; and he was sorry that he had touched on a painful subject. Poor child, she must feel as if she were going into exile! If Sir Reginald Dysart had possessed a spark of right feeling he would have got a home appointment, and returned to end his days in his own country with this lovely daughter.

"We shall have some charming scenery to show you," he said hastily. "These parts are quite new to you, I suppose? Do you care for woods?"

"More than for anything else," she answered, brightening. "Some people like the sea, but I do not; it is melancholy, and I don't like watching the outward-bound ships, and thinking of partings and long goodbyes. But one can never be sad in 'the good greenwood,' and one never gets to the end of all its wonders and delights. I have often envied Rosalind and Celia in their forest life."

"Don't you think they would have found it a little slow without Orlando and the rest? One wants to study the book of man as well as the book of nature."

"As yet I have not got beyond the study of printed books," said Cherry, with a frank smile; "so you see that my education is very imperfect indeed."

"Time enough for completing it," he replied; and as he spoke he looked full into the spring-tide face, and wondered if it would change when the deeper wisdom had been won.

Later on, that commonplace remark of his came back with mournful significance to his mind. Who knows how long the sand has got to run in the little life-glass? Who can say how far the miles are measured for his friend?

Finding herself so easily understood, Cherry, in her turn, looked at her neighbour, and liked the face that she saw. In fact it was a face that most men (and some women) always liked at first sight. The features were not in the least remarkable for regularity; the nose was rather thick: but there was a good firm mouth and chin under the brown moustache, and the hazel eyes were steady and bright. Arnold de Wilton, descended from an ancient Norman line, had few of those outward signs which are supposed to mark the true patrician; and, in short, he looked more like a thoroughly respectable young

workman than the heir to one of the oldest baronetcies. Then, too, he was not above middle height, and the great breadth of his shoulders made him appear shorter than he really was, so that many ladies thought disparagingly of his figure. And yet when he moved and spoke, nobody ever had the slightest doubt about his position in the world.

Above all things men liked him for his downright truthfulness and pluck. At College he had done fairly well, without astonishing anyone by his attainments. He was a capital rider, a decent shot, and a good comrade anywhere; but sensible people shook their heads, and said that the lad ought to have had a profession.

At three-and-twenty he was an idle man with six hundred a year, which he had inherited from his mother. If Sir Henry de Wilton died without leaving a son, then Arnold, his nephew, would succeed to the title and estates. And the De Wiltons, who had been married for many years, were childless still.

Of the existence of this nephew, Cissy Dysart had known nothing. She only knew that Lady de Wilton had never had a child. And Cherry, the inexperienced and unworldly, had no idea that envious eyes were furtively watching her across the table. She was beautiful; she was talking with spirit; and she was looked at with evident admiration by the probable future owner of ten thousand a year.

Quite unconscious, as yet, of her triumph, Cherry was simply thinking that Lady de Wilton had been very kind in allotting her to this pleasant young man. Lady Rosanne Archdale seemed to be less fortunate; she had been consigned to the care of an old gentleman who looked exactly like Major Pendennis in his last days. But Cherry did not know that the brilliant brunette was by no means displeased to sit next to old Lord Rookstone, who was a rich widower, and possessed attractions too powerful to be counteracted by deep wrinkles and false teeth. And so, like most fresh young creatures, our schoolgirl wasted her compassion on a new friend, who did not want it.

For her own part, despite occasional pangs of conscience, Cherry was enjoying herself very much indeed. She had brought a good appetite from Cedar House, and was not too much excited to do justice to her dinner. At last, Lady de Wilton gave the signal to retire, and Cherry fell into the procession of gowns that swept softly through the gloom of the hall and into the lighted drawing-room.

Although lamps were burning under rosy shades, there was still some faint light lingering out of doors, and open windows let in breaths of flower-scented air. Cherry made her way to one of these windows, and looked out into the soft gloom of the summer night. Then someone went to the piano, and played a dreamy waltz, and the

girl mused, and enjoyed the music till Lady Rosanne came to her side.

"Are you composing a poem in the dusk?" asked Lady Rosanne. "Do you mean to write books when you get to India? There was a great friend of mine who went to the East, and wrote 'Lays of the Ganges.' Perhaps you have seen that book?"

Cherry replied that she had not seen it.

"It was rather nice, but he was nicer still;" Lady Rosanne said pensively. "What a mistake it is to form intimacies on the eve of a parting! Just when we had learnt to sympathize with each other, he went away. Be warned by me, Miss Dysart, and don't allow yourself to like any one very much if you have got to say goodbye to him."

"But one can hardly help having affinities," remarked Cherry, quite seriously.

"Can't one? I am afraid that is rather a dangerous notion of yours. What will Sir Reginald Dysart say if you develop an affinity without his sanction?"

"I have not thought about the matter;" Cherry answered, putting her hand up to her burning cheek.

It was the mention of Sir Reginald again which sent the hot blood into her face; but Lady Rosanne saw the gesture and suspected something which was not in the least like the truth.

She had begun to fancy that Lady de Wilton might have her own private reasons for inviting this girl to Heatherdown, and bringing her and Arnold together. And perhaps it was even possible that Miss Dysart had received a hint from her hostess.

This idea was not pleasant to Lady Rosanne, who was a born schemer herself, and did not choose that any one else should make plans. Moreover she had her own quiet little plots, and it would be too vexatious to have her arrangements upset by a handsome schoolgirl. For Lady Rosanne was far too shrewd to undervalue the newcomer's attractions; and it surprised her not a little to find that Cherry had none of the dowdiness often seen in girlhood. Already Cissy's predictions were being fulfilled, and Cherry's grace and style had been remarked by every one who had seen her.

"I hope you won't think my warning a nuisance;" Lady Rosanne said very gently. "Do you know that your youth and brightness make me feel quite old and faded? It seems an age since I left school, and yet it is not so very, very long ago. Ah, I wish I had had a friend's voice to warn me in my girlhood! Girls are sent into the world, and take their chance; a little wise counsel might spare them a great deal of needless suffering."

"Indeed I could not resent anything that you said,"

replied Cherry, with earnest voice and eyes. "But I did not know that I was in any danger. In a week or two I shall go away, and never see this house and these people again. While I am here I want to have a bright time; I should like to carry away some happy memories of Heatherdown."

"We will all try to make your stay pleasant," said Lady Rosanne with her ready smile. "They are coming in from the dining-room; and now we shall hear Miss Effingham."

CHAPTER VII.

MISS DYSART.

CHERRY, still sitting by the open window, drew farther back into the shade, and had eyes and thoughts for Miss Effingham alone.

There was a deep hush in the room. The shades had been removed from two of the lamps, and they were placed so that the light fell full upon the face and figure of the actress. She stood for a moment silent and motionless; and then in her clear voice, slowly and quietly, she spoke the first lines of a simple poem that told a very common story.

It was not the poem that one would have expected her to recite to a fashionable audience in a drawing-room; but Miss Effingham was a genius, and (what is more important still) a genius who was recognized by the world. She was therefore privileged to do unexpected things, and if she took it into her head to repeat half a dozen verses about an Irish emigrant, her listeners were as ready to

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applaud that simple narrative in rhyme as if it had been the finest production of Tennyson or Browning.

Moreover every one knows that the unexpected has a strange charm. And as she went on there were few present who did not forget the drawing-room altogether; lamps and statues and pictures faded away, and they saw only the lonely man, resting on the stile in the light of a fair May morning. The lark was singing; the corn was springing fresh and green; and the spire of the little church rose up among the trees.

She went on, putting her own soul into the lines, and the hearts of her hearers were stirred within them, and tears filled their eyes.

"I thank you for the patient smile
When your heart was fit to break,
When the hunger pain was gnawing there,
And you hid it for my sake;
I bless you for the pleasant word
When your heart was sad and sore—
Oh, I'm thankful you are gone, Mary,
Where grief can't reach you more!"

These were strange words to speak to an aristocratic party who had just eaten a costly dinner; and they went straight to the soul of one who felt that she had no right to be in such company. Cherry, in her shady corner, was shedding bitter tears. She was a daughter of the people, and the voice of the people awakened an echo in her

heart. Her father had been a poor man when he had married her mother; this story might have been their story. But as for these patrician men and women all around her—what had they to do with tales like this? What had they ever known of hunger and hopelessness? She wiped away her tears, and felt a sort of angry contempt for an audience whose emotions were stirred while their sympathies remained unmoved.

It was a very humble story, and they had all heard it before; but never till now had they realized all the strength and the grand, calm sorrow of it. For the first time in their lives they recognized the heroic patience of the starving wife, and even felt perhaps a little ashamed of their own selfish, easy-going existence. Lady de Wilton was crying quietly; but Lady Rosanne's lustrous eyes were undimmed, and she was watching the faces around with silent interest.

When the actress had finished, a deep murmur of applause greeted her; but she scarcely seemed to hear it, and, for one who was accustomed to far greater exertion, she looked strangely tired. Then she, too, sought a seat in the shade, and everyone understood that she did not want to be disturbed any more that night.

A little later, after a few words from her hostess, Cherry slipped away t her bed-room. Lady de Wilton was a motherly woman, and remembered that the girl was used

to early hours; she had been told, too, that Miss Dysart's health was delicate. But, as her young guest looked perfectly vigorous and blooming, she was inclined to regard the delicate health as a mere fancy.

"She does not look as if she had ever had the slightest ailment;" Lady de Wilton said to Lady Rosanne. "In her first letter she mentioned that she was not strong. I think Miss Noel must have put the notion into her head. If a girl is born in India people always seem prepared to make an invalid of her."

"I don't see how any one could make an invalid of Miss Dysart;" Lady Rosanne replied. "What a beautiful girl she is! Sir Reginald will be delighted with her."

"He ought to be," said Lady de Wilton. "But I don't know—I fancy that he has no heart. When he was first married to my friend Agnes, I remember thinking him rather a hard man. He was a good husband, I believe; but I always thought that Agnes was afraid of him. I hope he will be kind to this poor child."

"Oh, he is sure to be kind! Any man would be proud of such a daughter. He will marry her well, I daresay. Of course she will have some money?"

"I should think there is no doubt of that;" Lady de Wilton answered. "But I wish she had a good woman to look after her when she gets to India. Girls have their little heart-troubles, which cannot easily be confided

to a father. Not that I think Cissy Dysart's troubles have begun yet; but they are certain to come by-and-bye."

"Very likely she will not have time enough for sentimental troubles," said Lady Rosanne in a matter-of-fact tone. "Probably she will be married early, before she has had a chance of falling in love with the wrong man."

"I am not altogether in favour of early marriages, Rosanne. A girl ought to have opportunities of meeting many men before she gives herself to one for life. The first impulse of an inexperienced heart is often a mistake. But I fear that this poor girl may not be permitted to have an impulse at all. Sir Reginald will choose for her."

"Like a stern father in a play," said Lady Rosanne. "Are you listening, Mr. De Wilton? We are forecasting Miss Dysart's destiny."

"I should have known that, even if I had not been listening;" Arnold replied. "Every woman likes to believe herself a prophetess. Why are you busying yourselves about the future of that poor girl, and predicting all kinds of misery?"

"It was Lady de Wilton who predicted the misery. For my part, I think she will be happy enough if Sir Reginald marries her off quickly. But if he waits too long she will have time to develop all the sentimentality that is in her, and then she will give him some trouble."

"Sentimentality—that's always your word for a heart,

isn't it?" Arnold asked. "There is no doubt that Miss Dysart possesses a heart, and it was a good deal moved, just now, when she was listening to those verses about the Irishman."

"Yes, I noticed that. Fortunately for her, she is of an age when emotion may be safely indulged in without disfiguring the features."

Lady Rosanne accompanied this remark with a swift look at several ladies who had also been a good deal moved; and the glance comprehended her hostess, who was not yet old enough to have done regretting her youth. The good woman winced a little, and her nephew let fly a shaft in his turn.

"Nothing is as unlovely as impassiveness," he said; "and Balzac is right in saying that the best class of men prefer the face that is worn by feeling."

It was certain that no feeling had ever left its trace on the face of Lady Rosanne. At first you were quite dazzled by the brilliance of her beauty, but later on you found that she had the hardness of the diamond as well as its splendour. There was nothing soft about this young woman; even her voice, clear and high-pitched, had a metallic ring. Her own sex feared her, although when it suited her to be agreeable she was a pleasant guest in a country house, lively, clever, and always ready to keep the ball rolling. Even Lady de Wilton (who did

not love her) never failed to acknowledge that Rosanne had useful gifts, and was generally amusing.

"By the way, I wonder what made Miss Effingham select that dismal thing," she said, passing over Arnold's speech as if she had not heard it.

The actress had already retired; and an elderly man, who had been talking with her, now crossed the room and came to Rosanne's side.

"Miss Effingham has Irish sympathies," he said. "Did you not know that she was an Irishwoman by birth? I fancy that she was recalling early experiences when she was reciting that little poem. It was very fine; nothing could have been better done."

"Of course it was very fine. Her genius can dress up the commonest story," replied Rosanne.

"But the story did not need any dressing up," said General Bulstrode quietly. "There is real pathos in it, and it is beautifully told. Miss Effingham's genius has made us recognize the power of the poem."

Meanwhile Cherry was kneeling by her bed, and praying with all her heart for Cissy, away in Kensington, and when she arose she began to write a letter to her friend.

But before she had written many lines, sleep stole upon her unawares. She found herself dozing over the pen, and put it down at last, resolved to get up early and finish the letter before breakfast. Only half awake, she made

her way to the great white downy nest, and lost herself among the pillows with a delicious sense of going off into a new world of dreams. She was too sleepy even to give a good-night glance round her room, and shut her eyes with a vague impression that the satyrs carved on the chimney-piece were leering at her in an amiable way. No midnight visitant disturbed her rest, and she woke refreshed in the early brightness of the morning.

There had been some showers in the night, and the soft rain-scented air breathed on Cherry through the open window. Long afterwards she used to see that morning landscape again in her dreams. A faint haze confused the boundary lines, and clouded the low-lying land with a thin veil; but the light that rested on the hills was a tender brightness fresh from heaven. They were so cool, and still, and fair—those lovely hills—and they seemed to offer such a refuge to the mind that Cherry was loth to lose sight of them. But there was the unfinished letter in her blotting-book, and Cissy's claims must not be set aside.

She wrote rapidly, taking less pains with her composition than Miss Noel would have required of her, but telling Cissy everything that she had desired to know. And when the maid came in with an early cup of tea, the letter was finished, and the writer was wondering how she should contrive to get it posted? It would not do to

let any member of this household see an envelope addressed to Miss Dysart at Cedar House.

"I should like to take a ramble before breakfast," she said to the servant. "And I want to see the village and the ruin of the old monastery. Some one said it was quite near."

"It is quite near, miss; you may get there in a few minutes if you take the path to the left, which leads through the shrubbery. The village is just outside the fence, and you will see the ruin near the church, exactly opposite to the post-office."

Did Mary divine that the young lady was bent on a secret expedition to the post-office? Perhaps she did, and it is possible that her keen instincts had won her many a half-crown in time gone by. She lingered in the room for a few seconds, pointed out the shrubbery-path from the window, and then departed with the firm conviction that "Miss Dysart" had something on her mind, and would be looking round for a serviceable *confidante* before a week was over.

But Cherry, when she went out into the sunshine, did not dream that she had excited Mary's curiosity. She wore a chintz calicot gown with red ribbons at the waist and throat, and had put on a gipsy hat, artistically trimmed by her own hands. Her steps were swift as she passed through the shrubbery, although bees, butterflies,

birds, and flowers had entered into a conspiracy to check her progress. "Stop and look at us," they said, each in his own fashion: even a big snail, crawling slowly across the path with his house upon his back, put forth his claims on her attention. His condition, unendurable as it appeared at first sight, was not without its advantages; he had no landlord; for him there were no worries connected with rates and taxes and drainage, and there was no need to make any improvement in his desirable residence.

The village was only a cluster of picturesque cottages, and the ruin was a mere fragment of grey wall, overgrown with ivy and moss. And the post-office was a grocer's shop of the humblest description; but Cherry did not pause to inhale the odours of cheese and bacon. With a sigh of relief she dropped her letter into the box, and tripped back into the shrubbery walk again.

There was yet half-an-hour before breakfast; and she might revel now in the rainy freshness of the leaves, and break off thick clusters of the honeysuckle that swung its tendrils across her way.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HER BEAUTY MADE ME GLAD."

ERNOLD DE WILTON was an early riser, and liked to taste the first sweetness of a summer morning before other people were astir. The songs of the birds, and the peace and freshness of the time, stole into this young man's heart and made him grateful for life, and for the pleasant things of life.

He, too, turned his steps into the shrubbery, but he went at a sauntering pace, stopping to look at every trifle in his way. All the leaves were still shiny with rain; a giant sun-flower had its golden disc besprinkled lavishly with diamonds; a feathery mass of clematis glittered in the sun. He was whistling the air of "The Irish Emigrant" in clear tones that mocked the notes of a bird overhead; but his tune was sadder than the bird's, as human tunes are apt to be.

A turn in the path brought him face to face with Cherry,—Cherry in her calicot gown and quaint gipsy

hat, with rosebud lips, and grey eyes as clear as dew. She had quite a rustic air about her this morning, but it was the air of a young princess, playing at being a country maid; and as she came towards him, smiling a little, with her bunch of honeysuckle in her hand, he was aware of a strange thrill. It was not entirely a new sensation, for he was three-and-twenty, and a pretty girl was by no means an uncommon sight; but it was an emotion so powerful that it came like a warning of deeper feelings to come.

"You are wise, Miss Dysart," he said, as he greeted her. "It is always a pity to waste the first part of a summer day."

"School habits cling to me, you see," she answered.

"I hope you will never shake them off. The best times I have ever had were my early morning rambles in the midsummer holidays. I used to come to this old place when I was a boy, and bring a favourite chum with me. My grandfather was living here then."

"Then Heatherdown has always been your home?"

"Almost always. My father died when I was very young; and my mother went to live with her own people, for, somehow, she could not get on comfortably with the De Wiltons. It was not until after her death that my grandfather took me up. I was nearly thirteen when I

lost her; old enough, you know, to realize my loss, and feel terribly lonely."

"Yes," said Cherry, with a sigh. She, too, had been old enough to realize her loss; but she dared not say so. Cherry Dent had found herself a motherless girl at nine; but Cissy Dysart had no distinct remembrance of a mother's face at all.

"And then my grandfather sent for me. He was all alone in the old house in those days. Uncle Henry was in the diplomatic service, and could not spend much time with his father; and so the old man and I soon became quite necessary to each other. He was one of the kindest old men alive, when you got to know his ways and understand him. He never made any fuss about me, nor hampered me with senseless restrictions; I was free to roam at will all over the place, and I believe I know every inch of the ground in these parts."

"Oh, have you ever been to the top of the Delectable Mountains? I mean the hills that I can see from my window," said Cherry, eagerly.

"The Delectable Mountains!" he repeated. "Well, that really is not a bad name for our hills. Yes, I have climbed the highest of them many a time; but the shepherds that I found there, were not much like those who entertained the pilgrims. And I never caught so much as the faintest glimpse of the Celestial City."

"Did you not?" Cherry said, thoughtfully. "I think I should see it if I could get up there."

"I fancy that it cannot always be seen by the climbers. It is my notion that it is sometimes visible from the plain;—we are walking straight on in the common way, just doing our common duties as usual, and suddenly we catch the gleam of the golden walls. We must be dull creatures indeed, if we have never seen the merest glimmer of its glory."

They looked at each other, and smiled. Cherry was not much more than a child, but she had thoughts and dreams, and cherished that "devotion to something afar," which rouses us to put out all our powers. As to Arnold, he had seen quite enough of the world to know that it is not perfect enough to content a man, and he also had his ideas about improving it; but they were rather vague as yet. And so, when these two young persons smiled at each other, it was a mute expression of sympathy and fellowship.

Some one else saw their smiles, and said to herself that they had very soon arrived at the stage of mutual understanding. Lady Rosanne was standing on the terrace when they ascended the steps, and surveyed them with inquisitive eyes.

"Good morning," she said briskly. "You must have found the morning air delicious, Miss Dysart; but I hope

you remembered to put on thick boots. This is prose, and I daresay you have been indulging in poetry."

Cherry coloured slightly; there was something in Lady Rosanne's words, or in the manner of saying them, which sounded a little like a reproof.

"My shoes are not thin," she answered quietly.

"And the ground is not wet," said Arnold. "I met Miss Dysart in the shrubbery, gathering honeysuckle; and if you want a good handful, Lady Rosanne, you should go there."

"You are not civil enough to get some for me;" she remarked.

"Indeed I will, after breakfast;" he declared. And Cherry, with a sudden, bright smile, detached some sprays from her bunch and offered them to Rosanne.

They were accepted graciously enough, and the girl went away to her room to take off her hat before the gong sounded for breakfast. The day was beginning pleasantly, she thought, as she fastened a bouquet of blossoms on the front of her gown; but she felt a little afraid of Rosanne's great brilliant eyes. There was quite a merciless glance in those eyes, she fancied; and it would fare ill with her if Lady Rosanne ever discovered that she had a secret.

But no one seemed to suspect secrets, and everybody was bright and pleasant at the breakfast-table. After breakfast there was a departure; a carriage waited to take

Miss Effingham to the railway station, and Cherry saw her go with regret. A little later her hostess drew her gently into a shady room which was her own sanctum, and Cherry felt with fear and trembling that there would be an embarrassing conversation.

But Lady de Wilton, although she had meant to ask a great many questions, was led unawares into talking about herself, and the events that had happened in her own life. She clung with a romantic affection to the memory of her girlish friendship with Agnes. No other companion had ever taken the place of that first friend of early days. And Cherry was assured that she was like Agnes,—very like her,—but taller, and one or two shades darker.

"Your smile is hers;" Lady de Wilton went on. "And there is something in your way of moving and speaking which brings her back to me with wonderful distinctness. Oh, my dear, I wonder why she was taken away? I should be so glad to feel that she was waiting to give you a welcome in India. You do not care to talk much about your father, I see. Sir Reginald may seem a little stiff and cold at first, but you cannot fail to win his heart. And I suspect he was disappointed because he had no son."

"He wished for a son," said Cherry, in a choked voice. She had heard this from Cissy many times.

"Ah, yes; he could have done so much for a boy. He

has a great deal of influence, you know, and he would have ensured a young man's future. It has been a sore grief to us that we have no child. Arnold de Wilton is one of the best young men I know; but I wish it had pleased heaven to send me a boy of my own."

After all, this much dreaded private talk gave Cherry less trouble than she had expected. It left upon Lady de Wilton's mind the impression that Miss Dysart was sadly afraid of her father. The girl had not uttered many words about Sir Reginald, but her shrinking manner was eloquent enough.

Lady de Wilton was a sweet and kindly soul, but she was not a clever woman. She had persuaded herself that her beloved Agnes had been a crushed and unappreciated wife, and she was now quite ready to believe that Sir Reginald's daughter would be another victim of his tyranny. So fully convinced was she that a dark future awaited the poor girl, that she sought General Bulstrode, and entreated him not to talk to Miss Dysart about her father.

"Of course you knew Sir Reginald in India," she said, "and you would naturally speak of him to her, if I did not warn you. He must be an awful man."

"Well, no; he isn't exactly an awful man," the general replied. "A bit of an autocrat, perhaps; but his heart is in the right place, I believe."

"A heart? He hasn't got such a thing!" cried Lady de Wilton, indignantly.

"He does not wear it upon his sleeve, I admit; but I think it is in the right place," the general insisted, smiling. "Don't worry yourself about his daughter, Lady de Wilton; she is a beautiful girl, and a good girl, too, unless her face tells fibs, and I am sure it doesn't. When you are as old as I am, you won't be troubled so much about the future of the young folks; you will look on, as I do, with the comfortable conviction that Providence will shape their ends."

Lady de Wilton seemed to think it would be a long while before she had reached such a serene condition of selfishness. But although her interest in poor Agnes's child was very deep and genuine, there was a certain new hope, springing up in her own life, which naturally claimed nearly all her thoughts. It was, as yet, so young and weak a hope that she hardly dared to put faith in it, far less to speak of it; but, for all that, it occupied her whole mind day and night, and made her sometimes oblivious of everyday things. So all the fates combined to smooth Cherry's path, and avert the consequences of her wrong-doing. If she had been very much distressed by questions about her belongings, it is quite possible that she would have broken down, and confessed everything. But fortune favoured her deception in a surprising way, and she was

never put to any severe test. Everything was taken for granted, of course; no one was likely to think of that romantic plot which had been hatched in the dreamy brain of a sick schoolgirl. And Miss Dysart,—young, fresh, and fair, and with a kind of charming primness still lingering about her,—became a universal favourite.

Lady Rosanne did not like her; but "I care for nobody" was the motto of Rosanne's inner life. She was far too wise, however, to flaunt such a motto before people's eyes; and she began to bear herself so pleasantly towards the young girl that Cherry was touched. If a glance too sharp and bright for kindness sometimes flashed from Rosanne's eyes, and if she shrank from the hard ring in the high voice, Cherry almost blamed herself. She was amused, instructed, and often delighted with this pretty woman's talk. Rosanne had a droll way of describing little events,—a clever trick of dressing up common things in a quaint fashion,—which was more entertaining than the conversation of some of her highly-cultivated sisters. She often made cutting speeches, but she never bored you, and never chattered when you wanted silence.

"I have been hunting for you high and low," she said, meeting Cherry in the hall on the fifth day. "You have to be consulted on a most important matter. Has any one told you about the *tableaux vivants?*"

CHAPTER IX.

TABLEAUX.

"NO," Cherry answered, looking very much interested indeed.

"Well, we are going to get up some *tableaux,*" said Lady Rosanne, taking her arm affectionately, and leading her out of doors. "And you have no idea of all the mental wear and tear that I shall have to go through. Yes, and the physical exertion will be something fearful, for it devolves on me to pose the performers, and pommel and twist their rigid limbs into graceful attitudes. You can't imagine how stiff a human arm becomes when you wish it to assume a natural and easy posture."

"I think I know a little about it. Our school *tableaux* were of the simplest description, of course; but the pommelling process is quite familiar to me."

"You are the most delightful girl in the world," cried Rosanne, in high good humour. "A sympathetic coadjutor

is all that I ask for; and sympathy in this household is a rare thing. Lady de Wilton is perfectly good-natured and utterly incompetent; Arnold thinks the whole business a bore, and drives me mad with his half-hearted help; and the other men are mostly fools. However, we have several good-looking people here, and if we can only get them into shape we shall do very well. I must tell you that the *tableaux* and a ball are to come off on Sir Henry's birthday, which is to be a day of grand doings from beginning to end."

They went down the terrace steps, and crossed the lawn in the sleepy afternoon sunshine. And then Rosanne, who had a knack of finding out cool and shady nooks in summer, led her companion to some giant beeches, and they seated themselves on a rustic bench with an impervious roof of boughs above them.

"No fear of sunstroke here," said Rosanne, contentedly. "And no fear of bores; they are all taking their afternoon naps. Now we will begin to talk seriously, and the first suggestion shall come from your fertile brain."

Cherry reflected for a few moments, and the other furtively studied her thoughtful face.

"The best of all our *tableaux*," she said at last, "was a scene taken from the ballad of the Mistletoe Bough. It was an easy thing to do, you know; all that we needed was a pretty girl and an old oak chest. Of course we

found the first quickly enough, but the second was not exactly what we could have wished. However, every one was lost in admiration of our pretty girl, and had no eyes for the wretched old wooden box that did duty for the chest. I never saw Cissy look so lovely; we had dressed her in a sort of Elizabethan costume, a white satin gown borrowed for the occasion, and a ruff round the neck. I remodelled the gown myself, and made the head-dress and veil."

Cherry paused abruptly, suddenly conscious that she had mentioned the forbidden name. But it was a name that told Lady Rosanne nothing.

"We chose the moment when the poor bride lifts the lid of the chest," she went on. "She stood with her head a little turned, in the attitude of listening, just preparing to hide herself in her living tomb. I daresay the spectators liked it all the better because it made them shudder a little; they said it was the best *tableau* they had ever seen."

"It must have been very good," said Rosanne, honestly. "And it will be better still here. Do you know, my dear child, we have several splendid old oak chests in the house? Oh, we will make a scene that shall never be forgotten, I promise you! But you must consent to be the bride."

"I?" Cherry started and blushed. "No, no; you must not fix on me!"

"Why not?" Rosanne demanded. "You will know exactly how to pose yourself, and the posture will not fatigue you in the least. If I had asked you to stand on one leg, or support a heavy pitcher on the top of your head, or do any of the many painful things which people have to do in *tableaux*, you might have objected with some show of reason. You surely can't refuse to grant me such a small favour."

"But there are several pretty women here, and ——"

"Not one of them can look the part as you will. It is absolutely essential that Lovell's bride shall be in her first youth. Only a young girl would have played hide-and-seek at the risk of spoiling her wedding gown."

So Cherry yielded, not without visible reluctance; and the matter was settled.

They went on planning more *tableaux* until it occurred to Lady Rosanne to desire some tea. Then they returned to the house, and found a good many people in the drawing-room chatting over their cups; and Arnold de Wilton made his way to Cherry's side.

"Where have you been hiding yourself?" he asked. "I had a plan to propose, and could not find you."

"I have been sitting under the beeches with Lady Rosanne."

"Always with Lady Rosanne. One never sees you without her. How is it that you two are so inseparable?"

"I don't know," Cherry answered, frankly.

"Perhaps I do know, but I won't tell you," he said, mysteriously. "Well, do not be tied to her apron-string to-morrow afternoon, if you please, Miss Dysart. Will you promise to be free?"

"I will promise not to tie myself to her apron-string," she replied, with a demure little smile.

"But you will not undertake to struggle if she makes you her captive? Perhaps it will be wisest not to say what my plan is. You know the fate that too often awaits the best-laid schemes of men and mice?"

"Yes," she said, with a swift and stinging thought of a certain well-laid scheme in which she was very deeply concerned. And then, conscious that the monosyllable had a curt sound, she added—

"Lady Rosanne was talking over the *tableaux vivants* for Sir Henry's birthday. I suppose she has consulted you about them?"

"She attacked me on the subject last night," he answered. "There is nothing that I hate more than *tableaux*, but she always insists on getting them up if she has the shadow of an excuse. Last autumn I met her at a country house, and it was somebody's birthday then. Have you ever thought that people seem to have an unnecessary number of birthdays?"

"No; at the College we were all sorry that Miss Noel did not have two or three birthdays a year."

"You must have been a very happy schoolgirl," he said, in a musing tone. "Well, about the *tableaux;* Lady Rosanne has made up her mind to begin with 'Beauty and the Beast'; and she delicately hinted that I ought to be the Beast."

"That was too bad of her."

"Yes; it will be best to have a ferocious monster of stuffed fur. I'm afraid everybody will decline the part. Unless, indeed, you will consent to personate Beauty, and then I shan't mind being the Beast at all."

Cherry was beginning to say that she already had a part assigned her, when Lady Rosanne appeared on the other side of her chair. A few seconds ago she had been at the far end of the long room; but everyone who was acquainted with Rosanne's ways was aware that she was ubiquitous.

"A live beast will be ever so much better than a dead one," she said, gaily. "Miss Adair is going to be Beauty, and Mr. de Wilton ——"

"We will send to the furrier at P—— and hire that ancient stuffed bear of his," interposed Arnold. "He is a grand old fellow, and I only hope he won't tumble to pieces when he is moved from the shop-window."

"Very well," said Rosanne, composedly. "I have been

thinking of Una and her lion, but we don't want to be overdone with brutes, and Beauty and the furrier's bear will make a good *tableau*. There are other groups in my mind, but Mr. de Wilton's deplorable want of sympathy freezes up my ideas. Miss Dysart and I will discuss these matters when we are alone together."

Later on, when Cherry was in her own room dressing for dinner, it occurred to her that Lady Rosanne had been hovering round her very closely to-day and yesterday. Arnold had not been far wrong when he said that they were inseparable. Old Lord Rookstone had gone away, and ever since his departure Rosanne had devoted herself to Miss Dysart with never-failing amiability and persistency.

A good many things come into a young girl's head when she is alone; and now, for the first time since her arrival at Heatherdown, Cherry candidly admitted to herself that she should like to see more of Arnold de Wilton. She met him every day, of course, and he always found a chance of talking with her, but Rosanne was never far off.

"I wonder why she is so attentive to me?" thought Cherry, adjusting a bow here and a fold there. "Perhaps it is because I am supposed to be Sir Reginald Dysart's daughter; and yet that is nothing to her. Perhaps Lady de Wilton has wished her to be my friend while I am in this house. Or—perhaps she does not care to see Mr. de Wilton taking notice of any one!"

Standing in front of the glass, she saw a flush rising to her cheeks as this idea crossed her mind. She had been in the house five days, and already she had become so accustomed to her false position that she accepted all attentions as a matter of course. Moreover, she had lost all doubts about her own good looks, and was now perfectly well aware that she was thought more than pretty—beautiful. No one had openly admired her, as Cissy had been wont to do; but there had been hints, and glances, and stray words; and these proofs of general admiration had given her confidence in herself.

And now she was blushing because she had suddenly become conscious that Lady Rosanne was jealous of her. Rosanne was not the woman to be jealous without cause; not the woman to fancy dangers where none existed. She had a way of coolly appropriating Arnold which was hardly justified, even by her long intimacy with the De Wiltons. And Arnold, when he was a lad in his teens, had fallen under the spell of her brilliant face, and worshipped her in boy-fashion. The worship did not last; the boy's eyes wearied of her brightness, and his own honest heart detected her heartlessness; but Lady Rosanne still persisted in behaving as if she were his sovereign lady, and exacted homage which he was by no means willing to give.

It did not strike Cherry at this moment that Lady

Rosanne, in coming between Arnold and herself, was unconsciously acting the part of a true friend to them both.

The one danger that Cissy had not foreseen was now hanging over the girl whom she had loved better than a sister; and there was no one at hand to give a warning. Cherry, happy and beautiful, looked with involuntary approval at her own image in the glass, and lost sight of the fact that she was a fraud. She forgot that she had entered Heatherdown, and crept into the hearts of its inmates under a false name; she remembered only that she was young,—that the future was full of all sweetest possibilities,—and that Arnold de Wilton had looked at her with a pleading glance in his clear hazel eyes.

Meanwhile the soft summer wind stole in through the open windows, bringing no angel whisper on its breath. The satyr faces on the carved chimney-piece caught the light of sunset on their features, and leered mockingly at the foolish nymph of to-day. And Cherry put the last touch to her gown, took a farewell look at herself, and swept out of the room and through the long corridor as if she were—

"The daughter of a hundred earls,"

instead of lowly Cherry Dent, the humblest-born girl in Miss Noel's school.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE LONG GALLERY.

"DISS DYSART," called Lady Rosanne, in her high clear voice; "Miss Dysart, where are you? I think we had better go to the long gallery this afternoon, and study the costumes of the family portraits."

Mindful of Arnold's request, Cherry had tried to secure her own freedom. With a book in her hand she was sitting in a low chair, just within one of the open French windows of the long drawing-room. At the other end of the room, two old dowagers were dozing over their knitting-pins; out on the terrace, a peacock was slowly strutting in the still sunshine, and the roses in the grey stone urns were crushing their sweet, heavy heads together. It was a drowsy time; the bees seemed to be humming themselves to sleep; the soft wind scarcely stirred a bright thread of Cherry's hair. She let the book fall on her lap, and sat with eyes half-closed, waiting for Arnold to come and find her.

There was a firm step on the terrace, and she guessed that he was drawing near. But, almost at the same moment, that high-pitched voice came ringing through the room, rudely waking the old dowagers from their slumbers, and putting an end to Cherry's hopes of peace.

"You luxurious girl!" cried Rosanne, her great bright eyes widening as she caught sight of Arnold on the terrace. "You meant to spend a lazy afternoon here with your low chair and your footstool and your novel. But I am too true a friend to let you spoil your constitution in this way."

"You don't know the meaning of the word rest, I believe, Lady Rosanne," said Arnold, speaking through the open window.

"And I'm sure you do not," she retorted; "because you have never done any real work in your life!"

He bent his head meekly.

"Perfectly true," he admitted. "You are right as usual; but perhaps my working days are yet to come."

"Delays are dangerous," she replied. "You ought to have begun sooner if there is ever to be a beginning."

"Perfectly true again," he said indifferently.

"Come," interposed Cherry, rising with a smothered sigh; "if we are to study the family portraits, it had better be done at once. Every moment that I spend in this shady corner increases my delicious drowsiness."

"It was kind in me to shake you up before you had gone *quite* off into your doze," said Rosanne, leading the way to the door, while the two rudely-awakened dowagers followed her with wrathful eyes.

"Old ladies do not love me as a rule," she remarked to her companions as they accompanied her across the stone-paved hall to the foot of the great staircase. "My eternal vivacity annoys them. Old men, on the contrary, like a restless, flashing woman who is full of movement; it makes them forget their gout and the stiffness of their joints when they look at her. I discovered, long ago, that it was impossible to fascinate the aged of both sexes; so I gave up the old women."

"And your aunt's fortune also," observed Arnold, rather maliciously.

"That was a cruel reminder," she said; "but I have noticed that your spitefulness has largely increased of late. I wonder what it is that has brought all your worst qualities into play? It is quite true, Miss Dysart, that my sprightly temperament did cost me a fortune. My aunt basely left all her money to an apathetic girl with a gift for sitting still and picking up dropped stitches."

"She was a nice girl," declared Arnold. "She is married to a great friend of mine, and they are one of the happiest couples in the world."

"It was a pity that you did not secure the prize for

yourself, was it not? But it somehow happens that you do generally miss all the prizes of life, Mr. de Wilton."

Cherry was becoming heartily tired of the conversation. There was something hard and sharp under Rosanne's gay speeches and bright smiles; and she could perfectly understand why the old aunt had left her fortune to the girl who picked up stitches and sat still. Dulness itself would be a relief after this tremendous vitality. She almost began to wish that Arnold would go away, and leave her entirely to the mercy of her companion, who was always more agreeable when he was not present. But it was evident that he had no intention of going away, and he followed them slowly and heavily up the stairs with a stolid look of resolution.

"Oh, you are really coming with us, are you?" said Rosanne, pausing at the top, and turning round to front him. She looked very handsome as she stood there, with an old stained glass window behind her, and the softly-coloured lights tinting her figure and face. But he knew every feature and every glance by heart, and her attractions had lost all their power.

"Yes," he answered. "I want to correct the false impressions which you are sure to give of my ancestors."

"I did not know that you cared anything about your

ancestors. Like the grand old gardener and his wife, you always

'Smile at the claims of long descent.'

Is the smile an affectation? And do you really care after all?"

"I am glad that I come of decent people," he replied, as they walked slowly through the corridor.

"Decent people!" echoed Lady Rosanne, with a slight backward movement of her pretty head. "Why not confess honestly that you rejoice in being descended from all these women with pale oval faces and stiff white hands, and all these grave men in armour?"

"Mr. de Wilton is not in the least like any of them," said Cherry, speaking on impulse, and looking curiously at the portraits. "Here is one with a beautiful melancholy face of the Stuart type; did he ever do any great things?"

"He did a good many mean things," Arnold responded. "And I believe these fellows owe a great deal to their dress. Take away this one's ruff and decorations, and put him into this jacket of mine, and what would he look like then? Considering the hideous garb that we men wear to-day, I think we are a tolerably good-looking lot."

"Men have degenerated," said Rosanne, with her air of superb disdain. "They are perfectly aware of the fact, and so they are always trying to make excuses for

498

ARNOLD DESCRIBES THE PORTRAITS TO CHERRY AND LADY ROSANNE.

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themselves. After all, how can we expect them to be what their ancestors were? These knights had causes worth fighting for in their day; but now ——"

"Oh, do you think there is no cause worth fighting for now?" cried Cherry, with a sudden flush. "Is there not always 'the right that lacks assistance'?"

"But there are hundreds of different rights, and one really doesn't know which to assist," replied Rosanne, with a look of amusement. "Life is a complicated thing now-a-days; it was simpler in the past."

"Still, there are certain causes that may always be safely and justly defended," said Cherry, quietly.

"Are there? I am not sure about that. If you take the part of the crushed, somebody proves quite clearly that you have been cruelly unjust to the crushers. And if you go over to the crushers, somebody else instantly shows, with equal clearness, that you are a monster of oppression. It seems to me that the surest way to do wrong is to try to do right. The people who look on and don't meddle do the least harm."

"But they are as bad as Meroz," Cherry said, in a grave voice.

"Who was Meroz? Oh, I remember. Well, one may as well be cursed for doing nothing as for doing something."

"I would rather be cursed by all the world than by the angel of the Lord."

"My dear Miss Dysart, do you belong to the Salvation Army?" asked Lady Rosanne, opening her bright eyes very widely. "What an extraordinary turn the conversation is taking!"

"You started the conversation yourself," remarked Arnold in his calm tone. "It has run in a straight line up to the present point without taking any turn at all, Lady Rosanne."

"Well, let it stop short, by all means," she said lightly. "Now, Miss Dysart, here is a charming costume: this was one of the De Wilton brides of long ago. With very little trouble, I think we could make our white satin gown look like that?"

"I am sure we can," Cherry answered. "And I will set about it early to-morrow morning."

"Are you going to make the gown yourself?" asked Arnold, in astonishment. "Don't you know that the others will have suitable costumes made to order? Why will you waste your time over dressmaking?"

"Because there is nothing that I like better than dressmaking," replied the girl, frankly. "No man can comprehend a woman's delight in using her needle and thread. I can never hope to make you understand the joy that comes of artistic draping and arranging. No, I will not trust the fashioning of my bridal gown to any one else."

"Your bridal gown," he repeated. "Ah, I was for-

getting that you were the heroine of the Mistletoe Bough. Surely it is a dreary idea, this making a wedding dress for a living tomb. I don't like it. Can't you change the *tableau?*"

"And lose our best group," cried Rosanne. "Don't take a sentimental view of the matter, Mr. de Wilton. Miss Dysart will put on her real bridal gown later on, but she will be far away from us then. Can't you picture her in white robes and orange-blossoms, with a background of temples and palms? I am not wholly wanting in imagination, and I can see the scene with my mind's eye at this very moment!"

And Arnold, with a sudden pang, beheld that vision also. Rosanne looked first at him and then at Cherry, and silently enjoyed the effect of her word-painting. There was in this woman's nature that element of cruelty which would, in an earlier time, have had full play, and shown itself in scourging and burning. And just then the expression on that brilliant face of hers was not good to see.

Cherry had grown very pale, but both her companions naturally misinterpreted her paleness. Both attributed it to a dread of her unknown father, and a reluctance to begin her life afresh in a strange land. Lady de Wilton had declared that the poor child hated the thought of going to India, and Rosanne secretly suspected that a

new tie to England had already been formed at Heatherdown. This suspicion had become a certainty now; Arnold's quick look of pain and Cherry's whitening cheeks had made unmistakable revelations.

But Cherry, inwardly consumed with shame and self-reproach, longed to burst out then and there in a full confession. She longed to make an end at once of this pitiful sham, and tell them what she really was, and where her future home would be. Just for a second the secret actually trembled on her lips, and she would certainly have spoken if strong emotion had not checked speech. That pause, slight as it was, decided her fate, and gave Arnold time to speak first.

"If you have fixed on the costume," he said, "we need not waste any more of the afternoon in this gloomy gallery. Let us saunter out into the park, and get some air under the trees. I think the deer are better company than one's ancestors to-day."

CHAPTER XI.

THE DELECTABLE MOUNTAINS.

ROSANNE ARCHDALE was perfectly aware that Arnold was beginning to detest her with all his might; but she did not change her tactics in the least. All through the rest of that long day she kept close to Cherry's side, until the girl began to feel her constant presence a positive torture.

It was not often that Cherry's toilette took a very long time in making, and yet it came to pass that she was the last of the guests who made her appearance in the drawing-room that evening. Arnold was later still, and came in, indeed, at the same moment as the butler, who announced dinner. Cherry's cheeks, usually so cool, were now tinged with a pink flush, which excited Rosanne's suspicions. Could it be possible that the pair had met somewhere unseen, and contrived to make an appointment?

"But they will be immensely clever if they manage to

outwit *me*," thought Rosanne, enjoying her soup, and shooting swift glances at Arnold's inscrutable face.

What had really happened can soon be told. Arnold, made desperate by ceaseless thwarting, had repaired to the tapestried corridor, and spoken to Cherry on her way down to the drawing-room. Very few words had been said, yet they had sufficed to quicken the girl's pulses and brighten her eyes. But she kept her own counsel, and Rosanne did not get any information out of her that night. As to Arnold, he persistently kept away from his watchful enemy, and especially devoted himself to the two dowagers whose slumbers she had broken in the afternoon. "They are abusing me," she thought, "and he likes to hear them. In his present mood their voices are music in his ears. But this mood will pass, and our schoolgirl will go away, and then—why then old broth is sooner warmed than new broth is made! What a fuss Lady de Wilton is making over that chit—whispering in her ear, and sending her off early to bed!"

Early next morning Cherry was up and dressed, and ready for the maid, who brought a heavily-laden breakfast tray into her room. Lady de Wilton had settled everything in that whisper last night. Cherry was to get out of the house and go over the hills and far away before any of the other people were stirring; and Arnold was to be her companion. He had artfully represented to his

aunt that the child was absolutely pining for fresh air and liberty, and that Lady Rosanne was making herself a nuisance.

There was a delightful kind of excitement in gliding quietly along the tapestried corridor at seven o'clock in the morning, and knowing that you were out-manœuvring somebody who was very hard to beat. At every turn there was the fear of hearing the clear, high voice, or of meeting the flash of the brilliant eyes; but no Rosanne appeared, and Cherry gained the hall in safety. Arnold was waiting at the foot of the staircase, and a rush of fragrant air came in through the open door.

"Here you are at last," he said, with boyish glee. "What a brick my aunt is—she always does everything I want her to do! The morning is made on purpose for us, and you look as if you had been made out of the morning."

She had put on the gown that he liked, a cream-coloured cambric, figured with little cherry-coloured sprigs, and wore her gipsy hat. Anything fresher and sweeter than this girlish face of hers he had never seen. Her eyes shone with childish enjoyment as she ran gaily down the terrace steps by his side.

"We will go through the shrubbery," he went on. "How good it seems to be away from the house and all

the tiresome people in it! Women like Rosanne ought to be chained up; don't you think so?"

"I think it might be good for her," Cherry admitted.

"It would certainly be good for us. Any one who had courage enough to tie that young woman firmly into her chair would confer a benefit upon her and her fellow-creatures. But we will forget her for the present. Have you any idea where we are going?"

"To the Delectable Mountains, are we not?" asked the girl eagerly. "Oh, Mr. de Wilton, you can't realize my longing for a breath of heather-scented wind! I think there must be in many of us an instinctive desire for 'the strength of the hills.'"

"I know it," he answered. "I have felt it even as a boy when I used to climb these heights alone. I went up to the hill-tops to get courage to fight my little life-battles then, and I always came down strengthened. It must have been this instinct that sent men of old to the mountain solitudes to prepare their souls for some stern ordeal."

They had left the shrubberies now, and were passing through the sleepy little village at a brisk pace. A faint breeze was wandering through the cottage gardens, a gentle, frolicsome little breeze that played softly with the children's pinafores, and blew their curls into the wide-open eyes that watched the pair of early walkers. The

last cottage passed, they came abruptly to a beaten path that went undulating across a bit of flowery common, and then the climbing began.

The ascent was not as steep as it had appeared at the first glance. They went up and up, and the air seemed to grow fresher and purer with every breath; and presently they came to a great mass of heather, which Cherry lingered over in ecstasy. Could anything be more exquisite than these tender tints and delicately-fashioned flowers? Still up and up, until the faint tinkle of sheep-bells came drifting down to them; and the girl thought of Thomas the Rhymer and the silver bells that decked the elfin steed of the fairy queen.

"Let us rest here," said Arnold at last; and they sat down upon a little knoll and looked away over miles of purple shade and varied light. It was very still there; one or two crows went flying overhead, casting their large wavering shadows on the sunshiny hill-side; but there seemed to be no human beings nearer than the village folk, far down below, under those roofs of warm red tiles that nestled among the trees.

"You are not tired?" he asked. "No; I see that you are capable of a great deal of exertion. And, after all, a good stiff climb is not half as fatiguing as an afternoon tea. A long course of 'afternoons' has been known to end in softening of the brain. People exhaust all their

small talk, and then sit and glare at each other with maddening results."

"If you hate society, why do you stay in it?" said the girl by his side, looking full at him. "You are always scoffing at the world's ways, and yet doing as the world does."

"Perhaps I have not found my right place yet," he answered, smiling at those beautiful eyes that so often asked questions, even when the lips were silent. "Sometimes I am visited by a presentiment. I fancy that the place which is expected to be mine will be filled by some one else; and I see myself left free to find out other paths instead of the way that seemed marked out for me."

"Oh, do you believe in presentiments?" she asked, rather uneasily.

"No; I cannot say that I do. I have had so many that came to nothing. Yet now and then we do really feel the shadow of a coming event."

"I don't want to feel shadows." She shivered a little, although the sun was warm upon the hill-side. "I think I would sooner that the event should come upon me without any hint of its approach. A warning would scarcely make a sorrow easier to bear."

"And a foretaste of joy would make the bliss less sweet when it came. But one seldom hears of any spiritual herald of happiness. Our hearts are lifted up

sometimes, and we know not why; but nothing comes of the feeling. In fact, old wives tell us that the cloud is often the forerunner of sunshine, and the sunshine is apt to precede the cloud. They are half afraid of that unaccountable light-heartedness which we all know so well."

"Surely they are wrong," said Cherry. "I wonder how certain old-fashioned people first learnt the fear of gladness? Do you think it came down to them from some of their Puritan ancestors? Our Miss Grain at the College is a most austere person. She revels in gloomy things, and the worst of it all is that she believes it impossible to be religious unless you are profoundly miserable."

"And unless you try to make others profoundly miserable," added Arnold. "I know the class to which she belongs. They are denouncers, and go about among their friends rebuking them for their frivolities. But I am quite sure that they have never climbed the Delectable Mountains. They are so busy with their neighbours' faults and their own virtues that they cannot spare time to rise. Alas,

> 'Unless above himself he can
> Exalt himself, how poor a thing is man!'"

Cherry glanced at him for an instant with silent approval, and then looked away again over the rich country that lay spread out, map-like, below her feet.

"It is a difficult business to rise," she said at last, half sadly. "That is,—it is very difficult for some people to rise above themselves; they may be cruelly clogged by their position in life."

"I think people are more likely to be clogged in a high position than in a low one," he answered in a thoughtful tone. "But, high or low, the Delectable Mountains are set before us all, and the strength to climb is given to each. And don't you see that a good deal of life's misery comes from clambering up the wrong hill? There are hundreds who struggle and push their way up to the world's high places, and are lowered, not raised, when they reach the summit of their desire."

A flush of pain rose quickly to the fair face beside him. The "shaft at random sent" had found a mark little dreamed of by the archer. She did not speak, and he was too much preoccupied for some seconds to notice her silence.

"I am afraid I am boring you," he said, suddenly breaking the pause. "I believe I am apt to be long-winded sometimes—Rosanne used to say so. I don't know why I should have talked in this strain to you. Socially, of course, you never have known anything about the climbing mania; you have never even seen the frantic attempts that some make to get up in the world. Forgive me for being so stupidly prosy, and let us walk on, shall

we? We have not come to the shepherds yet, you know."

She rose, leaving some sprays of heather that she had gathered lying on the grass. They had gone some distance before he saw that she was no longer carrying her flowers, and asked if she had grown tired of them.

"No; I forgot them," she answered. "I wish now that I had not touched the heather at all; it is a sin to waste such bloom!"

"Never mind; there is plenty more of it," he said lightly. "Dame Nature is a lavish giver. I will get you a great handful as we go home, and you shall appear at dinner to-night decked out with heather and bracken as if you were Ellen Douglas or Flora MacIvor. Ah, if I could only find a sprig of white heather, what a gift I could give you!"

So they went on climbing, and came at length to a shepherd's little cabin, nestling in a green hollow. But although Cherry was regaled with a cup of fresh milk, and chatted, in friendly fashion, with an old man in a clean smock, who had spent his days in keeping sheep, she did not learn any wonderful things. She was happier when she stood alone with Arnold on the crest of the highest hill and they looked down together over a country as fair as that which the great Dreamer saw in his vision. As they stood there in silence, side by side, with their faces

turned to the east, one might have fancied that they, too, "thought they saw something like the gate, and also some of the glory of the place." But they spoke no more of the Celestial City that day.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE STAR OF THAT GOODLY COMPANY."

THE golden days had been gliding away, and every one seemed shorter than its predecessor. Ever since that memorable morning when Cherry and Arnold escaped to the Delectable Mountains, Rosanne had met them in a meeker spirit; and Cherry, conscious of a sense of victory, no longer quailed before her sharp sayings. Moreover, the schoolgirl had learnt to say smart things in her turn, although they were never uttered by ungentle lips. She had learnt to hold her own —to hold it modestly, yet with dignity, in this new sphere into which she had been thrust by Cissy Dysart's will.

Sir Henry de Wilton resigned himself to his birthday festivities with praiseworthy patience. He was a good-natured, easy-tempered man, who secretly hated festivities of all kinds; but he knew what was expected of him, and bore himself in an exemplary manner. Then, too, he had

Arnold for a right-hand man; Arnold, who was ready to arrange the feast for the tenantry, and oversee all the merry-makings that were to take place in the park. In the house, Rosanne worked with the energy of twenty ordinary women, labouring so persistently at the *tableaux* that Cherry, for conscience' sake, laboured too. The two were so busy that they were on excellent terms; besides, Rosanne was generally pleasant enough when Arnold was out of the way.

"You are the only person I can rely upon," said she, confidentially. "All the others will wobble,—see if they do not. There is not the slightest excuse for wobbling in Miss Adair's case; but she says that it makes her nervous to stand and stare at the stuffed bear. He does not smell nice, I confess; and little bits of fur keep on coming off him, but when we have arranged the light no one will detect how mangy he is."

"You can rely on yourself," remarked Cherry. "What a splendid Medora you are!"

"And what a poor creature I have got for Conrad! I have been on my knees, praying him to call up an expression of tender melancholy, and he is capable of nothing but a sulky scowl. Altogether, it is a disheartening business. The only certain success is the final scene—your own."

The birthday dawned fair and still, a day of peaceful

sunshine and dreamy beauty. It seemed a pity that the deep repose of the park should be broken by shouts and noisy laughter; gay tents marred the loveliness of its quiet glades, and the deer prudently retreated to sequestered spots that were far away from the house. The old village, too, was prettier under its sleepy every-day aspect than in its gala dress. Evergreen arches spanned the little street; strips of red cloth were lettered with birthday greetings; the tavern outdid all the other houses, and blazed with staring decorations. All day long the doors of Heatherdown were opened wide; people were coming and going; carriages were constantly driving to and fro; and Cherry found herself entirely deprived of the society of Arnold de Wilton.

To her it seemed a strangely dull and uninteresting day; and Fortune, who had been dealing out golden coins one after another in regular succession, was now playing her a shabby trick, and bestowing a copper penny. Instead of Arnold's companionship she had to endure the devoted attendance of General Bulstrode's nephew, a well set-up military man, with a handsome face and considerable confidence in himself. Other girls envied her good luck; Captain Bulstrode had always been made much of by women; he was of the type that figures largely in novels —a dashing, muscular hero, full of pluck and animal spirits. And it did not for one moment occur to him

that his attentions could, in any quarter, be esteemed a decided bore.

"My regiment goes out to India next year," he said, walking by her side on the terrace, and admiring her profile. "A few months hence, Miss Dysart, we may be sitting in cane chairs under a deep verandah, and chatting over our memories of to-day."

He was a little surprised, perhaps, that she did not express any delight at this idea. She only answered, in a peculiarly quiet tone, that it was safest to follow Sydney Smith's advice, and take short views. The reply was discouraging enough, but he was a good specimen of his class, and never knew when he was beaten; and so he returned to the Indian subject with new vigour. It was a long time before Cherry could get free; she seized the first chance which presented itself, and fled to her room with a heavy heart.

"What is the matter with me?" she murmured, half aloud, as she sank down on her sofa, and looked wearily round the room. The satyrs leered knowingly, as if they could answer the question if they liked. Hitherto every day had been full of Arnold, and, in spite of Lady Rosanne, the shield of his protection had been always cast over her; the unspoken homage of his heart was offered to her alone. She had lived "between the dawn and the day-time" of her first love, and had had her being in a

sweet vague world of half-lights and faint shadows. But in this world of indefinite and mystical beauty no maiden ever lingers long. The light spreads and brightens, and the dim path shows out clearly, with every obstacle strongly marked, every danger fully revealed.

And now the garish day was shining pitilessly into poor Cherry's shadowy realm, and bringing all her little weaknesses and delusions into full view. This was a new experience in her case, and it had come to her early in life. There are a good many people who jog on comfortably to the very end of their journey without once getting a perfectly clear sight of their inner selves. There are actually some men and women who go to their graves without ever having been made conscious of the fact that they are fools! Are they to be envied? I think not; for the disagreeable lesson which they have failed to learn in this world must surely be taught them in the next.

On the whole, perhaps, it was a very good thing for Cherry to sit alone in her room and consider all the humiliating details of her interior life. The wonder was, how could she possibly have been so blind? She had been sent to Heatherdown to improve herself, and finish her education by studying the manners and customs of the aristocracy. And now she had got a good deal more knowledge than she had ever expected to obtain. At the very outset of her venture, conscience had warned her

that nothing but pain can ever come out of deception; but it had not foretold the kind of pain. From the first Cherry had always told herself that the stolen waters would leave a bitter after-taste; but she had not thought that their flavour would take the sweetness out of everything else in life.

Poor Cherry! She was beginning to realize that she would never be a child again. She had taken her last look at the sunny land that is planted thickly with childhood's memories; for her the buttercups and daisies of life would never grow any more. A little while, and she must leave Heatherdown and its inmates, and pass away from their lives as entirely as if she had entered a different sphere. Death itself, she thought, could not sunder her more completely from Arnold than the return to her old life.

And yet, so complex is a girl's nature, that even at this moment she began to wonder whether he really cared for her. Surely it would be best if he did not care; best for her and best for him. Slowly and sadly she went over every word and look of the weeks that they had spent together; and memory showed her how those words and looks had taken a deeper meaning as the days advanced. Yes, he did care; and she seized upon the conviction and clung to it with a thrill of truly unreasonable joy.

Well, she must go on acting her part until her stay

came to an end; and she was glad—even now she was glad—that her time had not expired. She would just try to enjoy her life from day to day, and put the future out of her mind altogether. By-and-bye she must face her life quite alone. Cissy would be in India, and not one single link between herself and Heatherdown would be left. To Arnold she would be only a memory of a girl with whom he had spent some golden summer days, and whom he had almost learnt to love.

"I shall not know an easy moment till the *tableaux* are over," said Lady Rosanne later on. "Everybody is selfish; everybody but you, dear Miss Dysart. As to Grace Adair, she has never properly practised her pose. The truth is that she is disgusted because her beast is a dead one; she wanted a live brute, you see! As if one did not have enough of such creatures in daily life!"

But when the curtain was raised, there was a loud murmur of satisfaction which allayed the restless fears of Rosanne. Beauty, now that the moment had really come, proved herself equal to the occasion, and gazed so tenderly and pityingly on her bear that everyone was enchanted with her expression. The curtain descended with immense applause; the Beast, shedding portions of his fur all around him, was carried away by stalwart footmen, and deposited in a safe spot; and Beauty was heard to say that she hoped she had seen the last of him. This suc-

cessful beginning had put all the performers into a good humour; and the succeeding *tableaux* went off better than Rosanne had dared to hope. Even Conrad was not as bad as had been expected, and they all "wobbled" less than she had feared.

The curtain drew up for the last time. And then Arnold de Wilton, who had been but a languid spectator up to that moment, became so absorbed in the scene presented to his gaze that one or two persons spoke to him without getting any reply.

What he saw was the tall graceful figure of a young girl, her quaint white satin gown outlined against a dark background. A wreath of myrtle crowned her rich brown hair; she wore a ruff round her throat, and a cluster of orange-blossoms at her bosom. Close behind her stood a vast chest of old, carved oak, with open lid. One hand rested lightly on the edge of the chest; the other was raised, as if she were listening. The beautiful head was thrown slightly back, and the face was lit up with a sweet girlish playfulness that no one ever forgot. Long afterwards that face lived in the memories of those who saw it that night; it was so fresh, so pure, and so divinely fair.

Arnold did not hear a single word that old General Bulstrode was saying, close to his ear. He had eyes and thoughts only for that white-robed figure; and all the

498

CHERRY PERFORMS THE TABLEAU OF THE OLD OAK CHEST.

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horror and sadness of her story took possession of him there and then. It almost seemed as if he were not Arnold de Wilton at all, but that ill-fated young Lovell who had lost this bright girl-bride.

When the curtain fell he drew a deep breath of relief. Thank heaven all the fooling was over, and he should see her presently in a modern ball gown, and secure her for the first dance! The men all round him were talking of her beauty; old Bulstrode was looking at him with a quietly observant glance; he must talk, and be the same as usual. But it cost him an effort to rouse himself, and shake off the depression which the *tableau* had produced, and even Sir Henry noticed that his frank, cheery manner was wanting.

"You have had a heavy day, Arnold," he said, in an undertone. "Great nuisance a birthday; sorry I was obliged to have one."

"Oh, we have got through it very well;" Arnold answered indifferently. "Every one is pretty well satisfied, I think."

"Never saw such a lovely girl in my life as Dysart's daughter," went on Sir Henry, after a pause. "Pity she has to go to India;—hope she won't lose her bloom there. Eh, Bulstrode, what do you think of her?"

"If I were a few years younger I should go Eastward after her," replied the old soldier, with a sharp look at

Arnold. "And if young Lovell's bride were anything like her I wonder that he let her out of his sight for a moment. She wouldn't have had a chance to hide if she had belonged to me."

"I always thought he was a fool,—that fellow in the ballad," said Sir Henry. "Why didn't somebody think of the old oak chest?"

CHAPTER XIII.

A BITTER TRIUMPH.

A TALL young figure, arrayed in creamy Indian silk and delicate lace, was standing before the glass in her room, and asking herself if she were really Cherry Dent? There were no ornaments to break the outlines of the soft white neck and beautiful bare arms; the dress was simple, and its very simplicity brought out the rich girlish beauty of the face and form. On the sofa near lay the quaintly-fashioned bridal gown which she had worn in the *tableau*, and very gladly laid aside.

"If this kind of thing went on much longer, I should lose my identity altogether," she thought. "Cherry Dent,—Cissy Dysart,—young Lovell's bride,—which am I? Ah, I wish Cissy could see me to-night! No, not that: I wish she were here in her own rightful place, and I in mine. I ought to be in Effie Comyn's work-room, making ball gowns instead of wearing them."

Captain Bulstrode had made up his mind to secure Miss Dysart for the first dance; but Arnold, steadfastly determined to be before everybody, carried his point. He took possession of her as soon as she appeared, and there was an eager light in his eyes that made her tremble.

"At last," he said, sinking his voice almost to a whisper. "Do you know that I have not even heard you speak to-day? And to-morrow I must be up and away at dawn, so that I shall make the most of to-night."

"Are you going away to-morrow?" she asked, faintly.

"Yes; I shall be gone three days. My uncle wants some business settled for him in the next county; he has property there, and I have promised to see to it. Three days,—what an intolerable length they will be!"

They danced, and then went into the conservatory which made a great perfumed bower at the end of the long ball-room. A marble nymph stood up high among rich flowers and foliage, and poured a silver stream from her urn. There was a faint half smile on her lips as she stood there, watching the flow of the water, and a strange fancy came into Cherry's head as she looked at the figure. Was this marble woman some cruel Fate who poured away the happy moments of mortals, and watched the rush of the precious tide with her cold smile? It was rather a morbid idea, and the girl tried to put it out of her mind, but somehow it clung to her. The water went splashing

and tinkling sweetly enough into the great basin below; bright drops glittered on the green fronds of ferns, and gemmed the scarlet blossoms of a large plant that bent low over the pool; yet Cherry was glad when they moved away from the nymph and her urn, and sheltered themselves behind the dark shiny leaves of the orange-trees.

"It is no small relief to have you here, safe and sound," he said, gently taking the hand that rested on his arm. "That was a detestable notion of Rosanne's,—dressing you up as Lovell's bride,—I shall hate the sight of the old oak chest for the future, although I believe my grandfather set a high value on it. You must promise never to go near it any more."

"If I disappear unexpectedly you will know where to search for me," she answered, lightly. But as soon as the words were spoken she felt a sharp sting of pain. No; he would never know where to search for her; she must pass away from his life, and be hidden under another name, among people of whom he had never heard. And the time was growing short; the bright moments were gliding away; even here among the orange trees she could hear the measured flow of the water, and pictured the cold smile of the marble nymph. Yet she let her hand lie in that warm clasp of his; there was only a little while left, and she wanted as much happiness as she could get. Memories of these hours would be her food

in the dreary days to come; and those days were not far off now.

"Yes; I shall know," he said, looking down into her face with steady eyes. "I don't think you could ever escape me, even if you tried your hardest. India is not such a very long way off, you know. If Love laughs at locksmiths he is not to be beaten by a few thousands of miles, is he? For my part I think Love has quite as much pluck as we have always given him credit for."

"You seem to know a great deal about him," she replied, glancing away with a smile and a blush.

"That is because I have so lately made his acquaintance."

There was a rustle of trailing skirts, and a sound of gay laughter that drowned the plashing of the water. Arnold made a quick movement of impatience; here were some of the guests coming to invade their sheltered retreat; and of course Rosanne Archdale must be among them.

"What, still engaged in botanizing?"

It was the well-known high voice, and the speaker stepped forward, and stood, sparkling and glowing, in front of the pair. Her amber dress set off the dark brilliance of her beauty; diamonds flashed upon her neck and arms, and twinkled in her ears; somebody had once said that Rosanne in evening costume always looked as if she be-

longed to the Arabian Nights, and she had never been more splendid and Oriental than she was to-night.

"They are always studying plants," she went on, turning to her companion, who chanced to be Captain Bulstrode. "The other day they climbed the hills in the blazing sun to get some heather, and were missing from dawn till dewy eve. At dinner they both appeared jaded and faded, and the heather was decidedly in the same condition."

"I hope Miss Dysart will not pine for 'heather braes' by-and-bye," said Captain Bulstrode, looking earnestly at the girl's sweet, distressed face.

"If she does, she will know where to find them," Arnold answered, with something a little defiant in his tone.

"Oh, she will forget all about them in India," said Lady Rosanne, flashing him a parting glance and smile, as she moved away with her cavalier.

The two, standing among the orange-trees, were left alone once more; but that chance invasion had disturbed their peace. He bent down to look into her face with troubled eyes, and his hand caught hers again, and held it fast.

"Tell me that you will not forget," he whispered. "Just tell me so once, before we say good-night."

Her answer came low, and trembling, but it was distinctly spoken.

"I will never forget."

He stooped lower still, and carried her hand to his lips.

"I dare not ask you to say more yet," he said fervently. "But believe that whatever you do, and wherever you go, my heart will be with you always."

There was a brief silence; and Cherry could hear the soft water-music and the loud beating of her own heart.

"Some more people are coming," she said, gently drawing herself away from his tender, detaining hands. "We had better go back to the ball-room now, had we not?"

He drew a long breath, and began to move out of the leafy nook that had sheltered them. She was right; it was better to go back than to linger longer there; and his presence was wanted among the guests.

They returned to the ball-room, and Rosanne passed them with one of her bright, mocking smiles; but Lady de Wilton's kind eyes met them with a look of sympathy and affection. The look had a shade of trouble in it too; she beckoned Cherry to her side, and made her sit next to her.

"You are tired, dear child," she said softly. "Do not stay up very late; we must remember that you are not used to this kind of thing."

"I think I will go to my room soon," Cherry answered.

"It will be best; I am afraid you found the *tableaux*

498

ARNOLD CONFESSES HIS LOVE TO CHERRY.

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too trying. But you looked perfectly beautiful, my dear; I can't help telling you so; and I could not help wishing that your mother could have seen her child to-night. You are very like her; but poor Agnes never was so lovely. Sir Henry covets you; he does not know how to spare you to your father. We want you for our own daughter."

"You have been only too good to me," said the girl in a trembling voice. "I have learnt to love you so much that it will be very hard to go away. I cannot trust myself to speak of it."

"Then do not speak of it now; you are not going yet. But, my dear, I can't bear to see such a pale face; all this excitement has been too much for you. Certainly it has been a most fatiguing day."

"Miss Dysart," said Lady Rosanne, coming up with an air of friendly concern, "I am beginning to believe in your delicacy of health. At first I thought that Miss Noel was unnecessarily fussy and anxious; but now I see that she was right. You are looking fagged, and your eyes are very weary. I am so sorry I teased you about the *tableaux;* yet I don't know what we should have done without you."

"I am tired," Cherry admitted. "You know I am fresh from school, and I suppose it takes some time to get used to pleasure," she added with her usual simple frankness.

"You have done a great deal to make the day go off well," Rosanne said pleasantly. "Everybody is talking about Lovell's bride. As to the dress, it was simply marvellous."

"And you really made that dress without any assistance," said an old lady sitting near. "Ah, Miss Dysart, it is almost a pity that you are a rich man's daughter! Fate ought to have bestowed your gift upon some poor girl who has no one but herself to depend upon."

"I have no patience with Fate," cried Rosanne. "She is always making the most absurd mistakes; even her blindness cannot excuse some of her doings. But I am sure it is well for Miss Dysart that she is not compelled to use her gift; it is my belief that her dressmaking has been too much for her. She sewed away as if she had to earn her bread."

"I wish you had not let her do it, Rosanne," said Lady de Wilton uneasily. "It would be too dreadful if she were to over-task her strength while she is with us. What will Sir Reginald say if I do not take care of her?"

"Fortunately, we shall not be near enough to hear his bitter reproaches," Rosanne answered in a mischievous tone. "And he won't write them; it is only women who pour out their wrath upon paper."

Just then her partner came to claim her, and at the same moment Captain Bulstrode advanced to Cherry.

Little experienced as she was in the world's ways, the girl yet knew that it was best to exert herself, and overcome her disinclination to dance with the Captain that night. His conversation tortured her; it was full of allusions to their future meetings in India, and she could detect a half-subdued triumph in his tone that irritated her beyond expression. It was as if he meant to insinuate that this was De Wilton's hour, but his own time would come by-and-bye. His cool self-confidence annoyed his partner to such an extent that she longed then and there to show herself in her true colours, and let him know that the girl who leaned so unwillingly on his arm was not Sir Reginald's daughter. Truly Cissy Dysart's lot, enchanting as it had at first appeared, was not wholly free from bitter things; and Cherry felt unfeignedly thankful that she was to stay in England. And yet—what did it matter where she went or what became of her when once the doors of Heatherdown had closed upon her for ever?

She was looking so weary when the captain brought her back to Lady de Wilton that even Arnold forgave his aunt for her anxiety that Cherry should rest. When it was proposed that Miss Dysart should go to her room, he did not seek to detain her, although his glance followed her to the last.

Worn, spent, and sadder than she had ever been in her

life, Cherry found herself once more alone, and began, with eager haste, to divest herself of the beautiful gown which Effie Comyn's fingers had fashioned with such care.

"Oh, Cissy," she thought, as her heavy head sank on the pillow, "something tells me that I shall have to pay dearly for all the triumphs of to-night! Oh, Cissy, when you sent me here you did not know that I was going to win a heart in your name; and, worse still, lose my own."

CHAPTER XIV.

"HOW NOW! WHAT NEWS?"

AFTER tossing ceaselessly for an hour or two, Cherry fell asleep, only to dream of stormy winds and wild seas. A sense of trouble haunted her all night long; and she awoke at last with a sudden start to hear the rain plashing heavily against the window, and the maid knocking at her door.

A letter in Cissy's hand-writing was lying on the tray, but for some minutes Cherry was too drowsy and confused to read it. At last, refreshed by a draught of tea, she collected her scattered senses, and broke open the envelope with languid hands, knowing that, as a rule, there was very little news in Cissy's epistles. What, indeed, could she have to tell while she lived her uneventful invalid life at Cedar House, making her quiet preparations for India? But the first lines that met Cherry's sleepy eyes put all her languor to flight in an instant.

"Dearest, you must leave Heatherdown at once," the

writer began. "All my plans are changed. I have had a message from my father, telling me to come out with his friends, the Hopes; and alas! they start the day after to-morrow. As far as I am concerned, everything is ready, and this sudden summons matters little; but I am sorry for your sake. It would be most unsafe for you to stay on after my departure; the De Wiltons are acquainted with the Hopes, and they will hear that I am placed under their care. You must therefore make as good an explanation to Lady de Wilton as you can.

"I have a strange dread of the long voyage, Cherry; I think I feel something as Christian felt when he was about to cross the river. But this is only one of my foolish fancies, darling. And now goodbye; a long, long goodbye.—Your loving, CISSY."

For a few seconds Cherry remained motionless, feeling as if all her energy had deserted her, so utterly impossible did it seem to face this abrupt leave-taking. And then she roused herself, and began to dress with a sort of desperate courage, knowing that she dared not waste a single moment in breaking down. The maid who answered her ring, found her very pale but quite composed, and received orders to pack her boxes without delay.

But, as she passed through the tapestried gallery on her way downstairs, she was conscious that the hardest part of her task lay before her. Arnold was away; for him

there would be no parting words;—no farewell promises that could never be fulfilled;—but how could she bear Lady de Wilton's searching questions and expostulations? Surely some chance word would lead to discovery and shame! She felt herself turning cold with fear at the thought of leaving the house branded as an imposter. The good fortune that had favoured her hitherto might desert her suddenly at the last moment; her nerves, unstrung by the excitement of yesterday, were not equal to the demands now unexpectedly made upon her tact and fortitude. As she came down the wide staircase, trembling in every limb, the first person that she saw was Sir Henry de Wilton himself. He was standing at the foot of the stairs and giving hurried directions to one of the servants.

"I did not expect to see you up so early," he said, greeting her kindly. "No one has come down yet. I am sending for the doctor for Lady de Wilton; she is quite unwell, enough to make me rather uneasy."

"I am very sorry," Cherry answered. "She was looking sadly tired last night, I remember. Sir Henry, I have had a hasty summons this morning,—I must leave you at once."

She had gathered up all her forces, and was confronting him with a very pale face. It was well for her that he divined the truth, and spared her the necessity of speaking many more words at that moment.

"Ah, I see," he said slowly, "Sir Reginald has sent for you sooner than you expected, poor child!"

"Yes." Her voice was weak and tremulous. "Some friends of his—the Hopes—are going out directly, and he wishes ——"

"He wishes them to take charge of you. Certainly it is a good chance, for they are charming people, and they will make the voyage pleasant for you, my dear. But this sudden departure will upset you very much."

Relieved as she was to find that he took the matter quietly, Cherry could not help feeling a little chilled.

She had begun to believe that she was a person of considerable importance at Heatherdown, and had thought that this abrupt ending of her visit would be the cause of a good deal of lamentation. But it takes a long time to learn the unflattering truths of life, and few of us, perhaps, ever fully realize the very small part that we play in the lives of other people. The shallowness of "society" friendships is a wonderful thing to the young. A fresh girl, ardent, intense, and new to the world, is apt to attach a deep significance to the pleasant words and looks that greet her. These nice people who make much of her, and like her so well,—how sorry they will be when she goes away! What a blank will be left in their daily existence when she is withdrawn! And when she finds out how easily they part with her, and how little they really miss

her, she begins to take a gloomy view of human nature, and complains bitterly of the insincerity of men and women of the period. A few more years pass, and she becomes even as they. Time teaches her that if we were always pouring out our deepest feelings on our agreeable associates we should exhaust life itself. It is only now and then, thank heaven! that a parting means intolerable pain.

"All the preparations have been made," said Cherry, in a calmer tone and manner. "Miss Noel has arranged everything; there is really nothing more to be done. And perhaps it is a good thing not to linger too long over one's goodbyes," she added with a faint smile.

"You are a brave girl. Sir Reginald will be proud of you," said Sir Henry warmly. "A soldier's daughter ought to be ready to obey orders. But do you really mean to leave us this very morning?"

"I must catch an early train. The letter tells me to come at once. I shall be prepared to start in an hour."

"Well, that is fearfully soon. I wish, with all my heart, that we could have kept you longer; but there is no help for it, I suppose. I will go and tell my wife; it will vex her very much, I am afraid."

"Why tell her if she is ill?" Cherry looked up eagerly, and spoke in an anxious voice. "I—don't think I can help crying if I see her; she has been so very kind. And she cannot alter things, you see."

Sir Henry was really touched by the little sigh that ended the sentence; but he knew that there was good sense in Cherry's words. For the first time, Lady de Wilton had opened her heart to her husband that morning, and he was now a sharer in that great hope of hers. In his life as in hers, that hope had wrought a startling change, and altered the aspect of everything,

If, indeed, he should have a son and heir of his own, then Arnold's prospects would be entirely changed; instead of being the future owner of Heatherdown and its broad lands, he would sink into plain Arnold de Wilton with only six hundred a year. And it was a good sign that Sir Henry, even in his own natural joy, could not utterly forget that the new-comer must supplant his nephew. He had so long regarded Arnold as his successor, and had kept the young man so constantly by his side that it was painful to think of changes. Every one had treated Arnold with the deference due to the heir, and no one had thought it likely that there would be any slip between the cup and the lip. But here was another instance of the unexpected coming to pass. And of one thing Sir Henry was quite certain,—Sir Reginald Dysart, a great Indian magnate, and a rich man, would look coldly enough on young De Wilton as his daughter's lover.

Lady de Wilton had not been blind to Arnold's grow-

ing attachment, and on the night of the ball she had seen his feelings plainly shown. He had not even cared to hide them. But she, poor woman, had been troubled at the thought of love-making between Miss Dysart and himself, knowing that the inevitable disclosure of her secret would ruin his hopes. She had confided everything to her husband, and he, too, had felt that the sooner Arnold could forget Miss Dysart, the better it would be for them both. The girl had a heart, and it was young and fresh enough to be deeply wounded by a disappointment.

When, therefore, Cherry had made her sudden announcement, Sir Henry was distinctly conscious of a sense of relief. Her departure was a good thing for them all. His wife would cease to be worried about the state of Arnold's affections, and the undesirable affair would be nipped in the bud. It was a pity, of course; the girl was a sweet girl, and he would have given her a hearty welcome into the family circle. But he was an indolent man, and had a horror of scenes and disturbances of any kind, and he did not want to draw down Sir Reginald's wrath upon the heads of the De Wiltons.

"You are very considerate, my dear child," he said, taking one of Cherry's cold hands in his. "Lady de Wilton is a good deal knocked up to-day, and I am afraid she can't stand any agitation. But for you to go away without saying goodbye to her ——"

"What does it matter?" asked the girl, bitterly. "She will not think less kindly of me, and I shall never forget her. Please let me go, Sir Henry, without saying a farewell word to any one but yourself; it will spare me a great deal of pain."

"If you put it in that way I cannot refuse you," he said, gravely. "And now let me beg you to keep up your strength; I cannot tell you how sorry I am to lose you."

It was certainly unwise of Cherry to neglect her last chance of eating a dainty meal; but her appetite had utterly taken leave of her that morning. She longed to say goodbye to the shrubbery, and pay one farewell visit to the rustic seat under the shady beeches, where Arnold had sat by her side. More than all, she desired to make her way into the great empty ball-room, and seek the nook among the orange-trees in the conservatory. But all these melancholy consolations were denied her; and well was it for her that time was short. For of all the many useless tortures which love inflicts upon itself, these last looks at beloved resorts are the most inexcusable and cruel. Men indeed are rarely found to haunt the scenes of lost delight; it is only women who would fain linger, like ghosts, about the places consecrated by old happiness; and they often pay dearly enough for their morbid enjoyment.

CHAPTER XV.

"THE WEEPING MORN."

IT was still raining heavily when Cherry said her last farewell to Heatherdown; streams of water flooded the terrace and filled the vases, and the drenched roses bent their heads to the earth. The Delectable Mountains were hidden from her sight by a veil of thick grey mist; nor was there any sign of a possible break in the clouds, but Cherry refrained from adding any of her foolish tears to this universal deluge. She was, in truth, far too miserable to weep.

Sir Henry, kind and attentive to the last, had begged her to write to Lady de Wilton before she went on board. "Let us know," he entreated, "that you are safely settled with the Hopes. Or if you are too tired, pray ask Colonel Hope to send us a line. You know we shall all be thinking a great deal about you."

Would they? She was rather inclined to doubt the sincerity of those parting words. And yet if she could

have read Sir Henry's heart she would have seen that his expressions were perfectly genuine. He really liked the girl, and was sorry to lose sight of her; Arnold, too, would be sorely vexed at her sudden departure, and his uncle hated to see a gloomy face in the house. But Cherry drove off with the melancholy conviction that she would be forgotten before the sound of the carriage-wheels had died away.

She readily gave the promise that Sir Henry required. Cissy, she knew, might be relied upon to write to the De Wiltons; and they would never know, when the letter came, that they had entertained the false Miss Dysart instead of the true one. False and true alike were going far away from Heatherdown; and the wide sea would soon divide Cissy and herself.

The little railway station was reached at last; the ticket was taken; the luggage labelled; and then the train came panting up through pouring rain. She was off at last,—off in safety, without being detectedor exposed, and the period of her joys and triumphs was over. Quite over; and all the rest of her life would be as tame as an old song.

"I am dreadfully young," she thought, leaning back in a corner of the carriage with closed eyes. "I may have to go on living for fifty years or more. I wonder if any of the old people remember being wretched when they

were young! I suppose one even loses the memory of pain at last, and all the early days seem like a dream. Cissy used to like reading the tale of the Marsh-King's daughter—the princess who prayed for a moment's glimpse of the heavenly kingdom, and came back to earth to find that she had been lost for hundreds of years. I almost wish that it could be with me as it was with Princess Helga. Fancy finding Alderport changed into a new town, and all the people strangers!"

Meanwhile the train was rushing on, and the clouds were actually beginning to break away at last. Presently the rain ceased, and over the darkly-wooded hill-tops there was "clear shining." Cherry sat up and looked out of the window, remembering that it would not do to fall into a dismal reverie and be carried all the way to London. She was fast approaching the junction where she must leave the London train, and wait for the coming of another that would take her to Alderport.

There would be twenty-five minutes to spend at the junction; time enough for her to write a fresh address on one of her boxes and have it sent to Effie Comyn. She would not venture to carry all her fine things to the humble home in Alderport. It was a hard matter to hide anything from the sharp eyes of Mrs. Dent; and she could imagine that good woman's horror and indignation at the sight of her evening dresses. And not for the world would

she let her step-mother's hard hands touch that sacred gown which she had worn at the birthday ball. No; it should find a safe refuge in some corner of Effie Comyn's rooms, and none would ever know how many tender memories were wrapped up in its folds.

She carried out her intentions, and then went to sit in the dreary waiting-room until the Alderport train came in. She had not, of course, written to announce her coming; the summons to depart had been too sudden for that. And now she began to wonder what excuse she could make to her step-mother for her apparent neglect. It would be better on the whole, she decided, to make no excuses at all; Mrs. Dent would probably be angry with her for rushing home without giving any notice of her arrival, and she must bear all reproaches with meekness.

Common-sense so far asserted itself that she ate some sandwiches and drank some tea before proceeding on her journey. The sandwiches were hard and dry, and stuck in the throat as those dainties usually do when they are bought at a refreshment bar, and the tea tasted of engines and hot steam. But this meal was a good preparation for other unsavoury meals to come, and she remembered with resignation that there would be no more choice food for her. It would have been too rash, however, to have run the risk of arriving hungry at Alderport.

There were clear spaces of light in the skies, although

heavy clouds still hung about in dark masses here and there, and the air was sweetened by the rain. It was growing late in the afternoon when Cherry reached her destination at last, and found herself, with a sinking heart, upon the Alderport platform.

"Why, it's Cherry Dent!" said a shrill little voice close to her elbow; and a tiny hand in an immense glove took hold of hers. The speaker was one of the smallest women alive, and looked something like a very ancient little girl, whose clustering ringlets were the most juvenile part of her. The curls were crowned by an imposing bonnet of black lace, adorned with a scarlet flower which was like nothing that ever grew on earth. But Miss Croker was proud of her flower, and disdained the common buttercups and daisies, which were so absurdly like Nature that you might as well trim your bonnet in a field as send it to a milliner. She was proud, too, of her large Roman nose, which was as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus. But if her solitary life was gladdened by these harmless vanities, who could have the heart to quarrel with them? Not Cherry, indeed. She was cheered by the sound of the little tin-trumpet voice, and gave its owner a cordial greeting.

"I just ran down to the station to see if my parcel had arrived," Miss Croker went on. "And I said to myself I shouldn't wonder if the parcel doesn't come and Cherry

does. And sure enough I was right. I thought Mrs. Dent's letter would bring you back to-day."

"Did Mrs. Dent say that she wrote to me yesterday? Did she tell you that it was an important letter?"

Cherry put these two questions with much fear and trembling. If an important letter had indeed been sent to South Molton Street, how could she account for having missed it? Here was a new and unexpected danger confronting her at the first moment of her return; but Miss Croker's next words set her mind at rest.

"Mrs. Dent told me she had written to tell you that the rector's children had come home," she replied. "I happened to pop in last night, and found her, pen in hand. And there was a certain look about the corners of her mouth which convinced me that she wasn't to be trifled with. She remarked that your holidays had lasted long enough, and she meant to have you back to begin your duties."

Now Mrs. Dent was so little addicted to letter-writing that Cherry had not expected to hear from her at all, and had given Effie Comyn no directions about letters. She could not help wondering what the fate of the luckless epistle would be; but her mind, relieved of its apprehensions, did not dwell upon the matter. Chance had so favoured her that her sudden return would look like a dutiful act of obedience.

"I am glad you came, Cherry," said the little spinster,

kindly. "The fact is that your step-mother thinks you are unwilling to put your shoulder to the wheel. It may be a heavy wheel, but it will move by-and-bye if you only push hard enough. You don't want to be a governess, my dear; yet it's quite likely you may learn to be fond of the work."

Cherry did not think it at all likely; but she only smiled in reply. And then a cab was called, and Miss Croker was asked to take a seat in it.

"Ought we to let the poor horse draw two persons in addition to your enormous box?" said the tiny woman, hesitating. "Well, if you really don't think the load too heavy, I should like a little drive. It makes a change, and I don't get many changes. Certainly we haven't far to go."

No, they had not far to go. And never did the decayed streets of the old seaport town look more unlovely than they were on that summer evening. Never were the gutters more unsavoury, and the women and children more unwashed; and Cherry's soul recoiled from the place and all that it contained.

Miss Croker, who had been making unceasing efforts to reduce the size of her diminutive person by squeezing herself into a corner of the vehicle, enjoyed the drive immensely. It always gave her a sense of dignity to go on wheels, and she even looked out with a sort of mild triumph upon her pedestrian acquaintances. She repressed a sigh when the cab was clear of the last ill-

smelling street, and turned into a narrow lane with a churchyard wall on one side and a row of small houses on the other. Each of these houses could boast of a strip of ground in front, and the driver stopped at a neat green garden-gate.

"Here we are at Church Path, my dear," she said, laying hands on Cherry's travelling-bag. "And I hope Mrs. Dent is going to give you a good cup of tea."

"I shall like the tea better if you will share it," exclaimed Cherry, earnestly. "Dear Miss Croker, you must come in with me. My step-mother is always glad to see you, and—and I feel that I want you this evening."

Miss Croker's kind little eyes twinkled with sympathy. She lived next door to Mrs. Dent, and was an excellent neighbour.

"Well, well, it shall be as you wish, Cherry," she answered. "Make the best of things, and don't go in with a long face. Now call up a smile—do. That's better; there's your step-mother at the door!"

It was indeed Mrs. Dent herself who appeared in the door-way in a highly-respectable black gown and a very tall cap. She did not come forward to greet her step-daughter, but stood stiffly on the threshold while Cherry traversed the path. And then, holding out a hand, and offering a hard, red cheek, she said in a deep voice—

"I should have been very angry, indeed, Cherry, if you hadn't come back."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN CHURCH PATH.

THANKS to Miss Croker, who gaily invited herself to tea, the home-coming was not half so bad as it might have been. It is true that Mrs. Dent's deep voice always took a reproachful tone when she addressed Cherry; but Cherry never expected approval from that quarter. Nor did she expect anything but apathetic amiability from Rhoda, who was fat and indolent, and had never shown the faintest inclination to excite herself about anything in life.

When Ben Dent, the jolly sea-faring man, had taken Mrs. Lockie for his second wife, he had thought that he was doing a good thing for his motherless child and himself. And perhaps he was, for Ben (who was captain of a small yacht owned by a gentleman) had always found it hard to make his income cover his expenses. Mrs Lockie had a little money; she had, too, a daughter of h an own who was of the same age as Cherry, and the ily man,

grew up together comfortably enough. The small house in Church Path was kept in good order, the bills were paid, and Cherry had neat clothes and regular meals—blessings which she had not known until the coming of the step-mother.

Ben died when his daughter was fifteen, and left very little behind him. And then it was that Uncle Barnaby Goodall, of whom mention has already been made, came forward in a way that did him honour. He offered, as we know, to send Cherry to be "finished" at a first-rate boarding-school, and Miss Noel agreed to receive her at Cedar House.

Poor Ben himself had always wished the girl to be a governess. He had seen that she was pretty, and people had told him that she was clever. Mrs. Dent, too, frankly admitted the cleverness, although she would not have much to say about the prettiness. She would not, on any account, have stood in her step-daughter's light; and she did not fail to express her sense of Uncle Barnaby's goodness in the warmest terms.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Dent did not heartily approve of Cherry. She could not, perhaps, have given any definite reason for her disapproval, but our unreasonable feelings are often the strongest. And so it was that her voice (never a soft one) was always especially harsh when she spoke to the girl; and her face (never sweet) assumed a

certain sour expression when Cherry came into her presence.

The world is full of people who have these groundless dislikings, and no one will deny the discomfort that arises out of them. The old rhyme about Dr. Fell has been used as a sort of excuse for many an unreasonable prejudice—a prejudice which might have been easily overcome if it had not been persistently cherished. Just as the word "affinity" has served to cover a multitude of sins, so the phrase "want of affinity" has been the plea for a great deal of injustice and unkindness. Mrs. Dent was not cultivated enough to talk about affinities; she simply stated that she couldn't get on with her stepdaughter, and she certainly did not try to get on.

"It is a wonderful beginning for Cherry, to teach the rector's children," said Mrs. Dent, solemnly. "It seems like a providence that the old rector should have died just when her education was nearly finished. His death, you see, made room for a younger man with a family."

"But we all missed dear old Mr. Hinton very much," remarked Miss Croker quickly. "And if it hadn't been for his letters to Miss Noel, I hardly think Cherry would have been received at Cedar House. He was very kind."

"Of course he was kind," Mrs. Dent admitted, with an air of doing him justice. "But he wasn't a family man,

and if he had gone on living there would have been no girls at the rectory for Cherry to teach."

"I don't like to feel that Mr. Hinton died purely for my personal advantage," said Cherry unwisely.

"If it pleased providence to remove him for your personal advantage, you ought to be thankful," rejoined her step-mother in her deepest voice.

"Oh, no; I could not be," exclaimed Cherry.

"There!" ejaculated Mrs. Dent, pointing her out to Miss Croker and Rhoda as if she was a rare and terrible object. "There! Did you ever before in all your lives behold a person who flew right slap into providence's face, just after it had bestowed a benefit upon her?"

"My dear friend, don't put yourself out about it," said Miss Croker, ever ready to pour oil on troubled waters. "You may be sure that providence doesn't take offence at trifles. And as Mr. Hinton was such a friend of your husband's, and always took such an interest in Cherry, it's natural that the girl should regret him. Why, didn't he tie the knot for you and the captain? And didn't he say afterwards that you were the finest-looking couple in the parish?"

"Did he really say that?" asked the widow, perceptibly softening.

"To be sure he did, and a great deal more, too." Miss Croker was utterly unscrupulous when she wanted to

make peace. "He told somebody—I name no names—that few young girls in their teens could equal Mrs. Dent in her maturity. It was a pretty sentence; but he had the art of expressing himself well."

Cherry, embarrassed between an intense inclination to laugh, and as intense a gratitude to her ally, moved nervously back into the shade.

"Well, so he had," said Mrs. Dent. "So he had, I must confess. And poor Captain Dent was very fond of him. Now, what are you getting up for, Miss Croker? Sit down again this minute, and stay to supper."

"I couldn't think of such a thing," declared the little woman, uplifting both hands. "I've been wasting your time with my chatter; and Cherry wants to go and unpack her box."

"Cherry is a strange girl in many ways, but she can hardly want to unpack her box upon an empty stomach," replied the widow, on whom the dose of flattery had taken excellent effect. "We've a beautiful piece of cold beef, and you know what my pickled cabbage is; so stay you must and shall."

"I can't resist the pickled cabbage," said Miss Croker, sighing a little over her own weakness. "And what a treat it will be for Cherry! They never allow girls to eat pickles at school. I daresay she has tasted nothing as delicious as your cabbage since she last went away."

"Well, I hope it will make her thankful for her mercies," observed Mrs. Dent, piously. "We will have the beef in at once, and then she can go early to her room. She will have a room to herself now; and that's another comfort that a girl doesn't get at school."

If Cherry had been inclined to laugh a minute ago, she had much ado at this moment to keep back tears. As in a lightning flash she saw the sunny chamber in Cedar House, the two dainty white beds, and all the pretty knick-knacks that Cissy had gathered around her. Then, too, arose a vision of Cissy's self, delicate, lovely, refined as she always was; and she seemed to hear again the tones of the sweet voice whose echoes would never die out of her life.

She may be forgiven, perhaps, if she was not as thankful for cold beef and pickled cabbage as she ought to have been; and yet the fare was by no means to be despised. But her face looked so pale as she sat at the supper-table that Miss Croker jauntily proposed sending her to bed, and enjoying themselves without her.

Left alone at last, Cherry was free to shed a few quiet tears; and then she looked round her with a forlorn feeling of being out of her element altogether. Only last night she lay down to rest upon a great downy bed, and rested her head upon lace-edged pillows; to-night she must lie upon a narrow mattress that felt like a sack of

potatoes. Why, oh, why did they choose a wall-paper covered with large straggling blue lilies, and sprawling leaves and tendrils twining round poles? Why was there such a small looking-glass? She sat down upon the solitary chair and wept afresh.

The little room felt close, and Cherry's head was hot and aching. Going to the window she threw up the sash and let in the sweet fresh air of the summer night. Noises from the town assailed her ears, but stars were shining calmly over crowded roofs and chimneys, and their beauty seemed to give her peace.

Cissy, far away at sea, might be watching those very same stars, and thinking of her desolate friend. The soft air cooled her hot temples and freshened the room, and she began to feel the desire of sleep. When one is eighteen years old, and healthy and strong, it does not matter much what kind of couch one lies upon. So Cherry slumbered sweetly and soundly upon her potato-stuffed bed, and did not wake until a sunbeam slipped in and stole across her face. At that golden touch her eyes slowly unclosed, and she wondered vaguely where she was.

Her first glance rested on the bold pattern of the wall-paper; and the impossible blue lilies, staring at her in the morning light, were a positive insult to the eye. A well-worn deal wash-stand and an ugly old ewer with a broken spout are not beautiful objects to contemplate in one's

waking moments, and two threadbare strips of carpet give an air of squalor to any apartment. With a deep sigh Cherry raised her head from its meagre pillow, and then sank back again, and began to think.

For a little while she lay watching the flies dancing airy quadrilles under the low ceiling, and at last raised her head for the second time. Out of doors was a wide-awake world, and work waiting for her hands to do, and sundry scraps of old-fashioned wisdom might be picked up by an active mind and brought into common use. "The work which is done 'with all thy might' may be a failure;" said her conscience, "but thou art not less bound to do thy best."

Moreover, there are worse things in life than chipped ewers and threadbare carpets; worse things even than this appalling wall-paper, from which the æsthetic soul recoils. And Cherry reflected that she might be now doing wholesome penance for all the delights that she had so meanly stolen. "Do you deserve to be surrounded with beautiful things?" she demanded severely of herself. "Remember that you crept into society under a false name, and made people like you by mistake. Remember your own baseness and deceit, and walk humbly for the rest of your days."

She got up and washed and dressed, stifling a little groan when she found that the glass was of the kind that

presents a distorted reflection. For a pretty girl to see her delicate nose broadened, and her mouth widened, is no small trial of temper; but Cherry nerved herself to bear it, and went down the narrow stairs with a brave determination to be bright.

"Well, you are looking all the better for a good bed and a comfortable room!" was Mrs. Dent's morning greeting.

"I am very well, thank you," said Cherry, cheerfully.

"I wish I could hear Rhoda say that she was very well," remarked Mrs. Dent, with a small sigh. "She is always heavy in the mornings, poor girl; there's no life in her. And yet she never can tell me what's the matter!"

Cherry thought that it would not be very difficult to tell what was the matter with a young woman who persistently declined to exert herself. "Eat the fat and drink the sweet" was Rhoda's rule, and Dr. Watts's famous sluggard was no fonder of his bed than she was of hers. But Mrs. Dent steadily ignored her daughter's failings, and always spoke of her as an interesting invalid.

"I suppose, mother," said Cherry, with a glance at the green limes that shaded the churchyard, "that I must go to the rectory this morning, and see Mrs. Warland."

"Yes; you must go, I think. But they won't expect

you to begin lessons to-day. And it will be only right and proper for you to pay a visit to your uncle Barnaby this afternoon."

"Certainly," replied Cherry, who had made up her mind for anything and everything.

CHAPTER XVII.

WOUNDED AND HEALED.

THE gardens in Church Path were bright with the last glories of summer, and the grass in the crowded churchyard was thick and long. There was no charm in the spot save the soft shadowy grace of the old limes, and the beauty of the few half-wild flowers that clustered round some of the neglected graves ; but Cherry, passing along under glimmering lights and shadows, found a certain sweetness here, and was grateful.

Only a stone's throw from the churchyard wall stood the rectory—a tall, grim-looking house of dark-red brick, with a small paved space between the iron gates and the door. As Cherry opened the gate and ascended the door-steps she thought of her last visit to this house, and her parting interview with Mr. Hinton. His kind words came back to her with a new power in them now: and yet they had only been such simple words as an old clergy-

man would speak to a young schoolgirl. Perhaps life, or the sorrow of life, had brought out a hidden meaning that was in them; anyhow, the remembrance of them comforted her as she stood waiting on the familiar threshold.

Yes, Mrs. Warland was in, and she was ushered into the drawing-room to await her coming. All the quaint old furniture had disappeared, and in its stead the new and commonplace reigned supreme; but Cherry was prepared for changes here, and only met them with a quiet sigh. The old rector had been a bachelor, but his nieces had come to stay with him sometimes, and they had always used this room freely, scattering magazines and books from Mudie's about the tables, putting a work-basket here, and a writing-case there. Nobody, however, could ever use, or want to use, the show articles which were now arranged with elaborate carelessness, and nobody would have got much intellectual food out of the "birth-day books" which abounded. The door opened, and a small, faded woman came in.

Just for a second Cherry was chilled and surprised. This greeting was so different from the other greetings that she had so lately received that she almost started. And then she remembered that Mrs. Warland knew her to be simply what she was—a young woman of humble birth who had been trained to be a governess.

But—but even if Lady de Wilton had known her merely as Cherry Dent, there would have been the usual gracious sweetness in her manner. Perfect breeding, combined with natural kindliness, always gave a charm to everything said and done by the mistress of Heatherdown. In Mrs. Warland the breeding was wanting, and the kindliness was not sufficient to atone for it.

The new rector's wife was a good woman in her way, but it was, and ever would be, a wooden way. She lacked few of the usual domestic virtues, and was a true wife and an affectionate mother: but no one outside her home ever sought her sympathy. Most people's instincts tell them where sympathy is to be found, and Mrs. Warland escaped a good deal of pestering by not possessing any. The empty jar attracts no flies; but wherever honey is, thither the swarms will come.

Yet it is a curious thing that sympathetic women, upon whom demands are constantly made, retain more of youthful comeliness than their less impressionable sisters. Mrs. Warland's face showed countless little lines; her mouth had hardened early; her skin had lost all softness. She was a brown woman, dressed, rather youthfully, in a brown gown, which deepened the general impression of her woodenness; and all her joints were stiff.

"Good morning, Miss Dent," she said in her dry tones. "I am glad you have come home. The children

are unsettled after their holidays, and I wish them to begin duties at once."

"To-morrow morning," replied Cherry, "I shall be quite ready."

"Yes; not later than nine. It is fortunate that you are so near us."

Cherry felt instinctively that Mrs. Warland was quietly scanning her from head to foot with secret disapproval. Not only was the girl's rare beauty objectionable, but she was committing the unpardonable sin of wearing a perfectly-fitting gown, and of bearing herself with an unconscious stateliness and grace, most unsuitable to a person in her position. The rector's wife, who had had several interviews with Mrs. Dent, was not at all prepared to find Cherry so attractive. She had expected to see a dowdy young woman, bashful and humble to the last degree; but Cherry certainly was not dowdy, and (although perfectly gentle and modest) she was not troubled with bashfulness.

Mrs. Warland's first thought was that she had made a mistake in engaging Miss Dent; her second, that she had secured a capable governess on low terms, and it would be a pity to give her up because she was too stylish.

She gave another searching glance at Cherry's gown, and saw that it was of cheap grey linen, trimmed with white braid, and a coarse kind of lace; but it was made

and worn in a fashion which excited her envy. Mrs. Warland was not a woman of the world; her acquaintance with society and its ways was very limited; yet she felt instinctively that Cherry had caught a trick of speech and manner which she had laboured in vain to acquire. And, without meaning to do the girl any injustice, she mistrusted her.

"I think the rector would like to see you for a few moments, Miss Dent," she said, after a brief pause. "I will go and tell him that you are here."

Mrs. Warland went away abruptly, shutting the door behind her, and leaving Cherry in a miserable state of depression. This was a bad beginning, she thought with a heavy sigh; and then her fancy wandered away to Effie Comyn's work-room, and she longed after the busy dressmaking life more ardently than ever. It would be so hard to get on with this angular woman. Yes; it would be hard, admitted the inward voice; and it added that she stood in need of severe discipline. "You deserve to be beaten with many stripes," said the stern monitor, "and it is good for you to suffer all kinds of humiliation."

She was trying to feel humble and resigned, when Mrs. Warland came back, and coldly informed her that the rector would see her in the study.

Poor Cherry's spirits were sinking lower and lower as she followed her conductress along the passage that led to

the well-known room. In former days the study had been one of the pleasantest apartments in the house, as peaceful a nook as ever offered its quiet seclusion to a scholar. Cherry had looked almost with awe upon the multitude of books; and the rows of college prizes in their rich and sober binding had often moved her to respectful admiration. But now the old familiar shelves had disappeared; and only a small book-case, very scantily furnished with volumes, was to be seen. Mr. Hinton's successor was not a reading man.

But if Cherry missed the books, much more did she miss the dignified old rector, with his clean-shaven face, and old-world courtesy. He was gone, and in his place there was a parson of a new type, with the largest black beard that she had ever seen in her life. He had a pair of restless dark eyes that seemed to be always looking here and there for work to do. He was a good man, earnest from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet; and he never laid aside his earnestness for a single moment.

When a letter from Miss Noel, written in answer to the Warlands' inquiries, had come to the rectory, the rector had been exceedingly glad. He was a man of small means and large family; and he honestly wanted to do his best for his little girls. Miss Noel had praised Cherry so warmly that he had felt sure that Miss Dent

would prove a treasure. And there is little doubt that he would have accepted the governess with perfect faith, if his wife had not come to him and whispered her misgivings.

Believing thoroughly in Mrs. Warland, and having a high opinion of her sagacity, he was inclined to see Cherry from her point of view. And so it came to pass that he met the girl distantly and awkwardly, and never said one friendly word to gain her confidence. His restless eyes scanned her distrustfully, while his restless hands fidgeted with the buttons of his clerical coat.

Cherry, as she stood silently confronting him, was wishing that the study floor would open and swallow her up. In a curt, cold way he reminded her that the duties she had undertaken were serious—very serious ;—and he hoped she had a deep sense of her own responsibility. She could only murmur that she hoped so, too, and that she would try to do her best ; but she had the wretched consciousness of being doubted. The miserable interview did not last long. Mr. Warland, fortunately for her and himself, was in a hurry. But it was quite possible for a sensitive young woman to be made extremely unhappy in six or seven minutes, and poor Cherry went away almost crushed.

The sunshine lay warm and bright outside the rectory gate, and instinctively she sought the green shade of the

limes, and was soothed by the soft rustling of their leaves. Children were at play beside the churchyard wall; and surely of all the comforters that God has sent to a troubled world, a child is the sweetest and best.

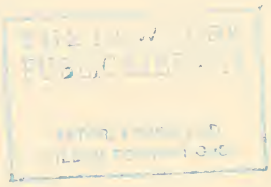
There was one little fellow of two who was babbling happily to himself, apart from his elder brothers and sisters; and Cherry stooped to bring her face to a level with his, and humbly beg for a kiss. The blue eyes looked startled for a second; then came a shy smile, and a slight uplifting of a dimpled cheek. The girl caught him up in her arms, and felt that the touch of his little fingers healed her heart wounds, and quieted her troubled spirit. The child looked at her again, fixedly this time, and, with his wonderful baby wisdom, he seemed to understand her joy in him.

Thus, beside the churchyard, where the dead slept in peace, Cherry drank in the purest teachings of life. She learnt that there is never any lack of comfort for the saddest soul if it will only look for it in common places, near at hand, where Christ's "little ones" are to be found. Every narrow street and crowded court of our great cities teems with these little comforters, whose angels behold our Father's face. They are always with us, holding out tiny hands to bless us,—tottering beside us, with baby feet, to lead us to eternal rest.

"I feel as if I could never let him go!" said Cherry

498

SHE STOOPED AND BEGGED A KISS FROM THE LITTLE FELLOW.



to herself. "How shabby his frock is! I will find out his name, and make him a new one."

It was very easy to find out his name. A tidy-looking little girl, with a baby in her arms, stepped up and gave the desired information.

"He's my brother, miss; little Walter Stevenson. Father's a waterman; we've come from the Isle of Wight to settle here with grandmother in her cottage. Mother takes in washing; and I minds the children."

"I should like to see your mother," said Cherry. "I wonder if she would let me make a new frock for Walter. Do you think she would?"

"Yes, miss, she'd be very thankful: that she would," replied Jenny Stevenson, quite fervently. "When the washing's done, mother's that tired that it seems as if her back was coming in two. And father's clothes takes a deal of mending, and our Tommy tears his things dreadful. That's Tommy, playing there with yaller curls; he's four. Baby ain't twelvemonths yet. There was more of us, but we died."

While Jenny talked she was leading the way, past the church, to a little narrow lane. On one side was the high wall that shut in the houses and gardens of the coastguard; on the other stood an irregular row of cottages, some new, and others so decayed and patched-up that one could hardly tell how old they were. In

one of the most ancient of these dwellings lived Walter and his family; and Cherry could see at a glance that the place was kept neat and clean. It was pretty, too, in its way; the old roof had gathered a wealth of stone-crop and moss; the small windows were set deep in ivy; and a mass of jessamine covered the crazy porch. An old woman, with a white cap tied under her chin, sat sewing in a chair on the threshold; and a younger woman, just inside the door, was up to her elbows in soap-suds. They both gave Cherry a hearty welcome.

"I haven't got any money, Mrs. Stevenson," she explained. "But I can make and mend things as well as most. So I've come to offer to help you with my needle, and the first thing to be done is a frock for Walter."

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNCLE BARNABY.

"THAT perfect gentlewomen those two Mrs. Stevensons are!" mused Cherry, as she went back to Church Path. "How easy it was to make myself understood, and how soon we glided into intimacy! Is it only the very high people and the very low who possess the secret of good manners? And is it no secret at all, but only the blessed, blessed freedom from gentility? Well, anyhow, little Walter and his relations have put new strength into me, and perhaps I may even learn to get on with the rector and rectoress by-and-bye."

Her stepmother was bustling busily about the house when she went in; and Rhoda, as fat and sleepy as ever, was sitting by the window with idle hands folded in her lap.

"How did you get on with Mrs. Warland?" was the widow's first question. "A trifle stiff, but quite the lady,

isn't she? The house looks all the better for new furniture and things, but a little more scrubbing wouldn't do it any harm."

Mrs. Dent's love of cleanliness was one of the best points in her character. Cherry heartily agreed with her that more scrubbing was certainly needed at the rectory, and so escaped answering the very natural question about its mistress.

"Oh, Cherry," said Rhoda, at last breaking through her established custom of habitual silence; "what a lot of lovely dresses you have got! Who gave you the grey tweed and the dove-coloured cashmere?"

"And the dark-brown cashmere, and the chintz?" added Mrs. Dent. "Where did you get the money to buy them?"

"I did not buy them." Cherry was quite prepared for these inquiries, and answered them frankly enough. "You have often heard me speak of my friend Miss Dysart, who is an invalid? She gave me all the materials for those gowns, and they were made by Effie Comyn and myself. Miss Dysart knew that I was poor, and I could not refuse such kindness as hers."

"Refuse it? I should think not;" cried the widow. "What a pity she is gone to India; she might have done a good deal more for you if she had stayed here. You might have been her companion or something of that kind. She was very rich, wasn't she?"

"Her father is a rich man, I believe. She could not wear half of the materials for dresses that he sent home. In fact he was always sending boxes of things."

"Well, as I said before, it's a pity that she's gone," remarked Mrs. Dent with a sigh. "Still, you've had wonderful luck, Cherry. You may as well put on one of those cashmeres when you call on the Goodalls. You had better look your best, for your aunt and cousin hold their heads very high. They never come here; they're quite above me, and I don't want 'em. Your poor father always said that your Uncle Barnaby was the best of *that* party!"

"That is quite true," said Cherry, agreeing with her stepmother for the second time that day.

When Mr. Barnaby Goodall had retired from business, he had built himself a villa in the suburbs of Alderport, and now lived a long way from his old shop in the High Street. You had to pass through the old town, and take your course along quiet roads, by fields that bordered the sea, before you came to Silverstone.

It was a place that was very old, and had escaped the improving hands which have destroyed the charms of a good many ancient villages on that coast. Traces of the past still lingered here; and there were quaint farm-houses, and picturesque cottages, that no speculative builder had thought it worth while to buy up and pull

down. The trees, too, had stood for centuries, and could have told endless stories of bygone days if they had possessed the gift of speech.

> "The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade
> For talking age and whispering lovers made,"

still yielded its wealth of blossoms in the merry May-time; and there were queer little one-storied dwellings, buried under heavy thatches and masses of creepers, where the jaded townsfolk might enjoy shrimps and tea. The sea crept up the sloping beach within a few feet of the churchyard wall; the church itself was a beautiful old Gothic church, grey and stately, and worn with the smiles and tears of hundreds of summers and winters. Here the Alderport people used to come and worship before their own ugly church was built for them in George the Third's reign. Here, once upon a time, there had been a priory; and the chime of matins and vespers had drifted softly across the water to the outward-bound ships, like a parting benediction. Truly Silverstone was a place well stored with memories; a place where you might see visions and dream dreams, and lose sight altogether of the noisy, restless world of to-day.

Uncle Barnaby's villa was just the kind of house that destroys the poetry of an old village; but it was, fortunately, well hidden by elms and beeches, and stood back from the road. It was an imposing residence with

a verandah in front, supported by Corinthian columns, and a castellated tower on one side. Uncle Barnaby had said that he must have a tower, and his wife had said that she must have a verandah, and the architect had done his best to satisfy them both. The villa was called Castle Villa, and its occupants were justly proud of their home. They did well to be proud, not of the architectural merits of their house, but of the simple charms of its surroundings. It is not in every spot that you get the beauty of smiling fields; the deep shadows of old trees; and the everlasting freshness and breeziness of the sea.

Mrs. Goodall and her daughter were taking an afternoon stroll, but Uncle Barnaby sat smoking his pipe under the verandah, and there his niece found him. He was a good specimen of a florid, burly Briton, with a short, thick figure, which his daughter Emma greatly deplored, and which she had, unfortunately, inherited. Just now, when he was taking his ease in his favourite way, and sending up clouds of smoke to vanish amid the masses of flowering creepers over his head, he looked so thoroughly happy that it did one's heart good to see him.

"How are you, uncle?" said Cherry, stepping up, and giving him a kiss. "But I need not ask. I never saw you look better."

"I do enjoy my 'ealth, thank God;" Mr. Goodall answered with a beaming smile. "And you, my dear?

Well, you *are* a 'andsome girl, and I'm truly glad you've come to settle down among us. Not sorry to leave school, were you?"

"I cannot say I was not sorry. I had grown attached to Cedar House, and Miss Noel and the girls were very kind to me."

"That looks well. If you hadn't behaved properly they wouldn't have made you so comfortable. But you'll soon make friends here; and the rectory people 'll take you up and notice you. I hope you've been to see 'em?"

"Yes; I went to the rectory this morning."

"It's a fine situation, Cherry, if the pay aint much. Did you see the rector, himself? A mighty busy man he is, they tell me."

"I shall never like him as well as Mr. Hinton."

"Well, no; p'raps not." Mr. Goodall stroked his chin with a thoughtful air. "Mr. Hinton was still water, and he ran deep. But this one bursts out in a fountain of zeal all over the town, and the little streams run everywhere, and go gurgling and foamin' into the foulest places, where no livin' water was ever known to come before. You and I may prefer the old rector, but the new one's a good man."

"I daresay I shall get used to him," said Cherry, trying to speak cheerfully. "Anyhow, I shall do my

very best for my pupils, but I am afraid it will be a poor best."

"A poor best? And you so 'ighly eddicated!"

Mr. Goodall took his pipe out of his mouth, and looked at her with astonishment and disappointment plainly visible in his honest face.

"Don't be vexed, dear uncle Barnaby. I can never be grateful enough for all your goodness," the girl said earnestly; "but I fear that I have not the gift of teaching."

"There's no gift of teaching, child; that's nonsense. If a bottle's full of good wine it'll fill ever so many little glasses. Now you've been sent to a college, and you're as full as you can hold of the good wine of eddication, and all you've got to do is to pour it out into the little Warlands."

"Yes, uncle, but suppose the cork refuses to come out of the bottle?"

"I aint a-going to suppose anything of the kind, and don't you suppose it neither," said Mr. Goodall firmly. "I do 'ope, Cherry, that you'll take kindly to your dooties, and never so much as mention the dressmaking business again. Your aunt was saying, only yesterday, that we 'aven't got a single relation that's a dressmaker. You wouldn't wish to deprive her of that consolation, surely?"

"No, dear uncle; I do not wish to deprive her of any

of her consolations. And I will try my very hardest to please you, and prove myself grateful for your kindness."

"That's well spoke. Your aunt's a heasy woman to get on with, Cherry, as long as you keep genteel. She's almost too genteel for me sometimes, and now and then I put my foot into it. Never speak of any kind of business in her presence; that's a good rule to make. And never mention 'ams if you wish to dwell in hamity."

Here ended the private conversation between uncle and niece. Mrs. Goodall and Emma returned from their walk, and gave Cherry a cordial greeting. A tea-table was brought out under the verandah, and they all sat and drank tea in an excellent humour, while Emma plied her cousin with questions about London fashions. Cherry noticed, not without secret amusement, that Miss Goodall was always keeping a strict watch over her own h's, and instantly pursued and captured one if it happened to be missing.

It was altogether a very satisfactory visit, and Cherry parted with the Goodalls with many promises to come again soon. The sun was going down as she passed out of the gate of Castle Villa, and the sea had begun to burn with the opal colours of the dying day. She thought of all the gaiety and false triumph of the past weeks, and they seemed to her, at this moment, as fragments of a fevered dream.

The west door of the old church was open, and a swift impulse drew the girl's feet that way. As a little child she had often come here with her father on a Sunday evening in summer, and she went in now and knelt in the dim light and sacred stillness of the place. And when she rose and came out again the path of life seemed smoother than it was before.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FOURTH PUPIL.

GOOD old Izaak Walton has told us that every misery we miss is a new blessing; and Cherry, in the beginning of her governess days, escaped a good many of the miseries that she had expected to meet.

She did not find teaching either easy or delightful, nor did custom lighten her labour. But the rector's three little girls were dull children, and no one on earth could have led them on at a quick pace. Like their mother, they had cold hearts and narrow brains; and even their father (who loved them well) was sometimes struck by their lack of childish enthusiasm. Cherry went through "the trivial round, the common task," with unflagging patience; and it was always a joyful moment when the church clock struck three, and she was set at liberty.

Then, with eager feet, she sought the shady spot by the churchyard wall, where little Walter was sure to be found

at play. A child of two is the best of all good company; it surprises you every second with unexpected wisdom, and laughs at you, with enchanting scorn, for being astonished at its intelligence. I do not know that Walter was a marvellous child; I am inclined to think he was only a bright average boy; but Cherry, up to this day, believes him to have been the most wonderful little man ever made. Certain it is that her daily gambol with him tended, above all things, to reconcile her to her lot. But even with this consolation her heart often ached with a deep pain.

The maidens who were spirited away into Elfland were never contented with their old life when they came back; and Cherry's sojourn at Heatherdown had spoiled her taste for Alderport and its ways. Every morning when she woke, and every night when she lay down to rest, Arnold de Wilton's earnest voice seemed to be saying those parting words over again—"Believe that whatever you do, and wherever you go, my heart will be with you always."

They were the first words of love that she had ever heard, and they were spoken when the morning of life was at its freshest and fairest. She could never forget them; she might live, as she often told herself, to be an old woman, poor and lonely as some of the ancient dames in the almshouses, but she should remember them to the very last.

How had he borne the news of her sudden departure? Had he taken it as tamely as Sir Henry had done? Cherry felt that she would have given everything that she possessed just to know this one little thing. And her eager wish was gratified most unexpectedly, when she received a letter from Miss Noel.

The letter began with many kind apologies for not having written sooner. After Cissy's hasty leave-taking, Miss Noel, being much depressed, had gone away to the seaside for a change; and Miss Grain had shortened her own holidays to come back and take care of the house. And then, just after Miss Noel had departed, there had happened a very strange thing.

"I had just driven away from the door, on the day after dear Cissy's departure," wrote the kind woman, "and Miss Grain was still standing in the hall, when a young man drove up in a hansom. He was pale, and tried to hide the fact that he was agitated, and he asked whether Miss Dysart was really gone? Miss Grain replied that the ship had sailed early that very morning, and Miss Dysart had gone on board the night before. He turned and went away without asking another question; and Miss Grain was too much astonished to try to detain him. She says that he was undoubtedly a gentleman; but the affair is extremely puzzling. We did not know that our dear Cissy had formed any friendships. Can you throw

any light on the matter? She would, I think, have confided in you."

Poor Cherry was made so happy and so miserable by this letter that she hardly knew how to get through the rest of that day. Too well did she know who the inquirer was. He had made one last despairing effort to see her again. What if he were to go farther still, and cross the seas to find the supposed Miss Dysart? It was impossible to say what he would or would not do; meanwhile she was waiting for a letter from Cissy announcing her safe arrival, and then she would write and tell her all. Cissy was the only person who would know how to act in this terrible difficulty; moreover, she had declared her readiness, if need came, to make a full confession of the whole plot, and take the blame entirely on herself. And she would be as good as her word.

In answering Miss Noel, Cherry merely said that Cissy had never spoken of having formed any friendships out of her school life. And then she entered into an account of her own duties and the little trials of her new position, and asked for the advice and sympathy which Miss Noel knew so well how to give. There was great comfort in keeping up a correspondence with Cedar House, and feeling that she was not entirely cut off from the dear old days.

So the weeks glided on; and at last there came a still,

sultry morning, which Cherry remembered, long afterwards, as the forerunner of a troubled time.

A fine small rain was falling, filling the garden with mist that was touched with sunshine. Sitting at the open window of the school-room, Cherry was saddened by the scent of decaying leaves, and wished that she could breathe the healthy atmosphere of a hill-top instead of this warm, damp air. It was one of those days that cast a spell of languor on the brain, and make the head sick and the heart faint. And this was why the governess, less on the alert than usual, failed to see that her three pupils were exchanging masonic signs, and tittering mysteriously at each other.

They were dark-eyed children, all strikingly like their mother, and their brown skins and rough masses of dark hair gave them almost an un-English aspect. The eldest, an angular miss of twelve, was going through a series of strange gesticulations, when Cherry, whose gaze had been resting, spell-bound, on the wet garden, suddenly turned and looked at her.

"What is the matter, Janet?" she asked. "Do you not know that I am waiting till you have corrected the mistakes in your dictation exercise?"

Janet looked down, rather sheepishly, on her slate, and the others wriggled on their chairs, but they were all silent.

"I am afraid you are all three inclined to be idle to-

day," the governess continued. "Anna, why do you keep on looking at the clock? And Mildred, too? You see that it is only half-past ten, and the hands will not move any faster for being watched. Are you expecting anything to happen?"

Still silence; but there was a triumphant look of knowing something on the three dark faces. Cherry began to be irritated.

"Do you not mean to answer me?" she demanded.

"We are expecting Aunt Felicia;" jerked out Janet at last. "She will come in at eleven, and you are to give her French lessons, Miss Dent."

"I do not know your Aunt Felicia," said Cherry in a puzzled tone.

"She only came last night," went on Janet, with increasing confidence. "She is mamma's youngest sister,—Aunt Felicia Kelly—and she is as old as you are, Miss Dent, or older. She wishes to take French lessons, and you are to teach her, but you won't be able to punish her if she is naughty."

Cherry was surprised and uncomfortable. Mrs. Warland had not said a word about a fourth pupil, and she felt that it would be unfair to force Miss Kelly upon her in this sudden way. Conscious, however, that three pairs of dark eyes were intently studying her flushed face and

taking note of her discomfiture, she put on an air of dignified indifference.

"Have you corrected that exercise yet, Janet?" she asked in a cool tone.

Half an hour dragged wearily away; and then, at the sudden opening of the door the governess started, and the children put down their slates, and looked up in eager expectation of a little scene.

"Miss Dent," began Mrs. Warland in a decided manner, intended to crush any objections at once. "I have brought my sister, Miss Kelly, to study French with you. We think that from eleven till twelve will be the best hour."

"Will it not be an interruption for the children?" asked Cherry, who had risen and bowed to Miss Kelly. "Their lessons are all arranged, and every hour is filled up."

"Surely fresh arrangements can be made," said Mrs. Warland, shortly. "I do not ask you to give us any extra time, Miss Dent. If I desired longer hours, you might naturally make difficulties, but I do not. My sister wants to begin this morning, but she can wait till to-morrow if that will suit you better."

"Oh, I am sure Miss Dent won't mind beginning at once! I am so anxious?" cried Miss Kelly, sweeping little Mildred out of her chair, and sitting down by

Cherry's side. "Of course I'm not quite an ignoramus," she continued, with a little toss of the head. "We need not begin as the children do, need we?"

"Indeed I think that is the best way," said Cherry, submitting to her fate with as good a grace as possible. "Let us make a start by finding out how much you do really know."

And then they made a start; Cherry pointing to various articles in the room, and requesting Miss Kelly to tell her their names in French: and Miss Kelly giving most of the things wrong names. All this went on to the great delight of the children, who could not possibly attend to their own lessons while such an entertainment was provided for them. Their subdued titter at her mistakes aroused the wrath of the new pupil, who gave them all a hearty scolding when her lesson was over. As the clock struck twelve, Cherry rose with a sigh of relief, and prepared for the usual walk before the early dinner.

"I am going to walk with you," said Felicia, briskly. "We will go through the High Street. I want to see the town, and the barracks above all things."

"We seldom walk in the town," Cherry replied. "The suburbs are much prettier. And we always avoid the barracks."

"I hate country walks; they may be wholesome, but they are fearfully uninteresting," declared Felicia. "I

want to go where I can see people, and people can see me."

The rain had ceased, and the sun shone brightly when the walking-party emerged from the rectory door. All the morning Cherry had been feeling a physical oppression,—an intense longing for air;—but now she would willingly have given up the walk to escape from her new companion.

Felicia Kelly was better-featured than her sister, and although there was the same woodenness and stiffness of joint, she was less angular. Her dark eyes were brighter; her brown skin was of a healthier hue; her black hair more glossy and abundant than Mrs. Warland's. Yet, despite her youth and high spirits, Cherry liked her less than the rector's wife, and preferred the cold mistrust of the elder sister to the younger's free overtures of intimacy.

"I don't see why we shouldn't be friends, we two girls," said Felicia, when she had sent the children on ahead. "I daresay my sister Caroline fancies that I am come here to be as stiff and dull as she is, but she has made a mistake. If we play our cards well we may have a good deal of fun."

Nothing was farther from Cherry's mind, at that moment, than fun. Her heart sank at the mere sound of the word, for did not some instinct tell her that Miss Kelly's notion of fun was widely different from her own?

She was silent from sheer inability to speak, and her companion rattled on.

"I was with Jane for a long time. Jane is younger than Caroline, and she said she did not know how to manage me. I used to tell her that the best way was to let me manage myself, ha, ha! You are fresh from school, are you not?"

"Yes," answered Cherry, with a sigh.

"What a long while you must have stayed at school! I left when I was fifteen; and I've been doing nothing but enjoying myself ever since. I daresay you were moped to death at the college?"

"No; I was very happy there."

"Ah, you are telling a fib because you are afraid to trust me! I know well enough that you must have been glad to get to a lively town like this, where there are barracks and no end of fun. I'm not to be taken in by your prim governess airs, I assure you. I know you have put on that manner for the benefit of Caroline and the rector, but it doesn't deceive me."

"I have not put on a manner," said Cherry, wearily. "If I am grave it is because I have work to do, and because ——"

"Because what?"

"Because—you will not believe me,—I parted with my dearest friends when I left the college. No one here

can ever be to me what they were. I shall never cease to miss them."

"Make new friends and forget old ones; that's my way of going through the world!" cried the sprightly Felicia, with her usual laugh. "So this is the High Street, is it? Well, it might be worse, but I thought we should meet more people. Oh, here come two or three who are worth looking at!"

And then began for Cherry a time of intense humiliation, and it seemed to her as if she were walking over red hot plates of iron instead of an ordinary pavement. Her cheeks burned hotter with every step; her whole body tingled with shame from head to foot. Felicia, with a gait like unto that of the daughters of Zion, was mincing by her side, making audible remarks and shooting eye-shafts right and left. If Cherry could only have delivered her over to Miss Grain, bound hand and foot, she would have been a happier girl that day.

"I have enjoyed my walk, Caroline," said the newcomer, as they all sat down to their early dinner. "It is a fine day, and the place looked quite cheerful."

"Which road did you take?" asked the rector's wife. "I suppose you went straight to the sea?"

"Oh, no; we went straight to the High Street. Miss Dent wanted to show me the town."

The rector, who was carving swiftly and vigorously,

paused an instant in his labour, and gave Cherry a quick and searching glance. She flushed hotly.

"I did not want you to go to the High Street. I proposed another direction," she said.

"Did you?" Miss Kelly's manner was perfectly cool and innocent. "I thought you wanted me to see the town and the barracks. Of course I trusted myself to your guidance."

"Another time," said the rector sternly, "I think it will be best to avoid the barracks. There is no pretty scenery there, and there are a great many pleasant walks elsewhere."

"And the country air is better for the children. I have always told you so, Miss Dent," remarked Mrs. Warland in an aggrieved tone.

"Oh, there is no harm done, Caroline," cried Felicia in a conciliating voice. "Miss Dent only tried to please me, that was all. To-morrow we will betake ourselves to the fields or the sea-shore. I am sure I don't care where we go."

CHAPTER XX.

DARKENING DAYS.

THE next day, Cherry turned a deaf ear to Felicia's entreaties to go again to that ugly, bare road which led to the barracks. They went to their old haunt, the sea-shore; but although the white and yellow pebbles glistened like gold and silver in the sunshine, and the waves, pearl-crested, came foaming merrily in, there was no pleasure for any of the party.

The children, too, had wanted to go again to the barracks, because there was a wonderful confectioner's shop on that road, and Felicia had promised to buy them sweetmeats. Already this young aunt had found out the way to gain an ascendency over them, and they were ready to follow her lead anywhere and everywhere. Cherry was kind, but grave; and over-anxious, perhaps, to do her duty. Felicia never concerned herself about duty at all, and did not seem to possess such a troublesome thing as a conscience.

"We would not have told if you had taken us to Barrack Road, Miss Dent," said Janet, pouting. "No one would have known. And the sea-shore is such a stupid place."

"You are the most disobliging creature in the world!" cried Felicia, flinging stones into the water. "Any one else would have rejoiced in the company of a girl of her own age. Two can do what one can't; and we could have played into each other's hands beautifully. You need not think that Caroline will like you any the better for your rigid obedience. She does not like you, and she never will."

"I know she does not like me, but I shall do my duty all the same," said Cherry.

"And what good will that do you? Duty is not amusing, is it? My opinion is that you will go on with your dreary duties all your life long, and end your days as an old maid."

"One may easily have a worse fate," remarked Cherry quietly.

"I could shake you!" Felicia cried, with a vicious look. "When I heard that there was a young governess here, I felt sure of having a good time. Why can't we be friends instead of deadly foes?"

"I am no one's foe," answered Cherry in a sad voice. "If you wanted me to do you a kindness I would do it.

But it cannot be good for you to be tramping along that ugly Barrack Road in direct defiance of orders. Are you not here under the rector's care? And does not he know what is right?"

"He thinks he does," returned Felicia contemptuously. "For my own part, I believe I am as likely to be right as he is. He rushes here and there, worrying people about their souls, and I'm sure they don't thank him for it ——"

"Oh hush!" entreated Cherry, seeing that the three little girls were listening eagerly.

Felicia waved her hand at them impatiently, and they moved reluctantly away out of ear-shot.

"If you were not such a poor-spirited thing," she continued, "you would see that one may do just as one likes under that man's very nose. He knows everything that takes place in the parish, and nothing that goes on in the house. And it is just the same with Caroline. They are both so busy with schools and meetings and missions that they have no time to think about the household and the children."

"I am sure they are a good father and mother," said Cherry.

"No, they are not. They mean to be; but they have just crammed too many duties into their lives. They don't see how Janet is growing up; they simply take it

for granted that she is all right. Any one may influence their children without their knowing it."

There was enough truth in these remarks to keep Cherry silent, and set her wondering at the shrewdness of the speaker. But Felicia was shrewd, although she was wildly reckless and utterly unscrupulous. For two years she had lied and schemed and dared everything to get her own way, and she had learnt to study people and find out their weak points.

"The Warlands were very poor before they came here," she went on. "He worked with all his might in a wretched place among miners, and the living of Alderport was given to him as a reward. That was just what he worked for."

"I do not believe he worked for a reward," declared Cherry.

"Oh yes, he did. He would not admit such a thing; but he did."

"He did not." Cherry's grey eyes flashed upon the girl with a glance of contempt. "You cannot understand that there is so strong a desire in his heart to do good that it won't let him rest. He works because he loves work. He wants so much to drag people out of their sins and miseries that he can't let them alone. He would have worked just as hard if he had known that he would go to prison instead of coming here. And I respect him."

"Well, he doesn't like you, Miss Dent. He looks at you with Caroline's eyes."

"That does not alter my opinion of him. He is of the stuff that martyrs and reformers are made of. I daresay he makes plenty of mistakes; they all do. But he is real in spite of blunders."

She could see now that Felicia's penetration only went a very little way. It could not go deep enough to touch the good that lay under the rector's faults, which, after all, were not such bad faults as many people have. But then Felicia could never believe that any one was better than herself.

Both girls were silent for a few moments, watching the waves that came softly tumbling in at their feet. Miss Kelly was the first to break the silence.

"Either you have some private entertainment of your own, or you really don't care to amuse yourself in my fashion," she said meditatively. "I shall never get much out of you, and you are determined not to help me. I shan't waste any more time in trying to be civil."

"There is no reason why you should not be civil," replied Cherry, calmly. "But it is quite clear that we cannot amuse ourselves in the same way. I don't want to break any rules, and I do want to keep in the quiet, straight path."

"Very well," said the other, rising. "We may as well

go home now, I suppose. Of all dreary places in the world, I think a desolate sea-shore is the worst. If I came here too often I should be tempted to drown myself."

They walked back to the rectory almost in silence; but when they sat down to dinner Felicia began to speak rapturously about the charms of the coast.

"Oh, Caroline, how lovely the sea is!" she cried, "I had no idea I should like it so much, and it is doing me a great deal of good. I shall not care to walk into that stupid town again unless you send me there. Perhaps John will employ me in distributing tracts or visiting. I am quite willing to help him, you know."

This little speech touched the rector and gave him pleasure. His wife was really fond of the young sister who had been left motherless at an early age; and he was inclined to look upon her kindly. She seemed so simple and frank that it would surely be very easy to lead her aright.

"I shall not set you to work just yet," he said pleasantly. "And I cannot let you visit the unwholesome slums where I go. Enjoy the sea breezes, Felicia; you can walk every day to the shore if you like."

The next morning at twelve Felicia set out as before with the governess and the children; and Cherry began to think that she was accommodating herself to circum-

stances. But no; when they had got too far from the rectory to be seen from its windows, Miss Kelly parted from her companions.

"*Au revoir,*" she said gaily. "I shall join you again at this very spot. Of course you will not tell tales of me, Miss Dent, and I know I can rely on the three little girls. Janet is her Aunt Felicia's own particular friend."

Janet's eyes sparkled with pride at this compliment. Already Felicia had won her heart by flattering her, and taking her into confidence. Poor Cherry could manage any number of small children; but with girls of eleven or twelve she was not so successful. Moreover Janet had imbibed her mother's dislike to the governess, and had silently set herself against Miss Dent.

In utter discouragement of heart, Cherry pursued her way to the shore, feeling that her pupils shrank away from her more than ever, and that there was no hope of drawing any nearer to them. To-day she could not even try to amuse them with a story; they had very little imagination, and seldom cared about her tales. Her mind was full of anxiety; in some subtle way—she knew not how—Felicia Kelly would work her woe.

Cherry Dent was by no means a weak-minded young woman, but she had never been ready to take her own part against any one who oppressed her. When she loved, she yielded far too readily and completely to the

loved one's influence; and when she disliked people she endured them rather than free herself from them altogether. As regarded Miss Kelly it was of course difficult to know what to do. Felicia was as old as herself, and was not subject to her authority.

"I wish I had never taken the situation," thought Cherry, for the hundredth time, as they all walked back to the rectory. Felicia with an air of innocent cheerfulness, ran up to the rector in the dining-room, and told him that she was as happy as a queen.

"You can't think how well I get on with my little nieces," she said gaily. "But I am afraid Miss Dent does not understand me as well as they do. She is grave and reserved, you see; and I am quite open and childish for my age."

Again Mr. Warland gave Cherry a sharp doubtful glance, and again her cheeks burnt under his scrutiny. What a good actress Felicia was, and how well she knew the trick of making mischievous speeches that seemed perfectly harmless!

It chanced to be Saturday, and a half-holiday; and in the afternoon Cherry set off to Silverstone, resolved to tell some of her difficulties to Uncle Barnaby. But she could only see him alone for a few minutes; and, although he was kind, he did not seem inclined to sympathize. "It's early to be dissatisfied," he said, shaking his head.

"The Warlands are genteel, Cherry; and it's always been my wish that you should stick to gentility. Don't go casting off gentility for a slight cause; a genteel connection is a thing that ain't lightly formed. Stay in your place, and make the best of it."

So Cherry said no more to Mr. Goodall, and went away from Castle Villa as soon as she could. And then, as she looked far across the sea, and felt the salt breeze blowing against her face, her heart went out to Cissy with a great yearning. Oh, how gladly she would cross that wide waste of water, just to hear Cissy's voice, and touch her hand once more!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SCAPE-GOAT.

TIME went on, and every day Cherry grew more and more anxious for news from India; and Felicia grew more and more audacious in the tricks she played.

One morning, when Cherry and her charges were strolling about the beach, little Mildred startled her governess with a cry of astonishment. They had all been busily gathering sea-weed, an occupation in which the children had begun to show some interest; and their heads were bent over the wet shingle when Mildred made her exclamation.

"Oh look!" she cried. "Here comes Aunt Felicia with a gentleman!"

Cherry did look; and so did Janet and Anna.

"I've seen him before," said Janet, with a little knowing smile. "He sat near us in church on Sunday afternoon."

He was a tall, slim young fellow of four or five-and-twenty, fair and blue-eyed as a girl, with a curious expression of cunning and impudence on his delicate face. He did not look as if he belonged to any profession. He was not well set up enough to be a soldier, nor brisk enough to be a doctor's assistant or a lawyer's clerk; and in fact it would have puzzled any one to have found a place for him to fill, and work for him to do in a busy world. But he was good-looking, and Felicia appeared to be getting on with him very well indeed.

"Mr. Johnson says you are an old acquaintance of his;" she said, coming up to Cherry with her usual gay air. "He has known you by sight for ever so long."

"I have only been in Alderport a short time," Cherry answered coldly. She did not like the young man's ready smile and look of assurance.

"Oh, Mr. Johnson doesn't belong to Alderport. He is only staying here;" Felicia continued. "And he finds it very dull, just as you and I do."

"I have never complained of dulness." Cherry turned away as she spoke, and walked out to meet a wave that was bringing in a tangle of sea-weed. "See, Janet," she said; "here are some more treasures for us!"

"Some more rubbish, you mean!" cried Felicia with an impatient laugh. "Mr. Johnson isn't a bit deceived

by your pretences. He is quite sure that you know him as well as he knows you."

Seeing that the demon of teasing had got full possession of Miss Kelly that day, Cherry was obstinately quiet, devoting herself as much as possible to the children; but they, alas! were not disposed to help her in any way. Janet and Anna hovered round their aunt until she, herself, tartly bade them keep at a greater distance. Mr. Johnson, meanwhile, seemed quite undisturbed by Cherry's *hauteur*, and appeared to be thoroughly enjoying Felicia's company. She was in the highest spirits, and talked with a reckless good-humour which he found attractive. He walked with them part of the way home, but took his leave before they came in sight of the rectory. "Miss Dent," said Felicia, laying her hand on the governess's arm; "I really think you must be an old woman masquerading as a girl. I never saw any one as prim and stiff as you are. Why couldn't you be pleasant to Mr. Johnson?"

"Does the rector know him?" asked Cherry.

"No; but what of that? I suppose I may have friends of my own."

"Is Mr. Johnson really an old friend of yours?"

"Well, hardly an old friend," said Felicia, laughing. "Old friends are generally awful bores. I met him once or twice at Willowford in the spring, while I was living with Jane."

"And did your sister know him?"

"What a long list of questions! No, Miss Dent, Jane didn't know him; she is a humdrum woman, and never makes acquaintances outside her own narrow circle. Willowford is a country town, the very slowest place I ever knew. I was only too glad to pick up somebody agreeable."

"But isn't it wise to know something about a man before you begin an intimacy?" asked Cherry, gently.

The children had run on in front of the two girls, as they often did when they were nearing home; and the governess could speak freely.

"Yes," replied Felicia, with perfect candour; "it *is* wise, if you regard appearances, and don't care very much about amusing yourself. But to go back to Willowford; you can't have the faintest idea of the dulness of that awful little place."

"You complained that Alderport was dull, a few minutes ago."

"Did I? But nothing ever happens at Willowford,—absolutely nothing. There was a great burglary there just before I came away, and that was the only exciting thing that ever occurred. I was very glad to get acquainted with Mr. Johnson, and I don't care whether you are shocked or not at hearing me say so."

"You will take your own course, I see," said Cherry

in a quiet tone. "But I must ask you not to bring your acquaintances to me and the children."

Felicia's only answer was a laugh; and Cherry had no reason to hope that she might be free from a repetition of the annoyance.

And freed she was not. Day after day Mr. Johnson came strolling along the shore with Felicia, and the intimacy of the pair was evidently making rapid strides. They would not leave the governess alone, but seemed resolved, for certain reasons of their own, to force their company upon her. She was slowly making up her mind to seek a private interview with Mrs. Warland, and tell her that Miss Kelly's conduct was past all endurance, when a crisis came at last.

Matters had been going on in this way for more than a fortnight, and a long spell of fine weather had favoured the morning walks. And when, on a beautiful golden day, Cherry felt the soft kiss of the sea-wind, and listened to the gentle rush of the surf, she almost wished herself on Robinson Crusoe's island, away from all the inevitable annoyances produced by man and womankind. Here there was no rest—no peace. Felicia and her cavalier were coming towards her, all smiles and gaiety as usual.

Mr. Johnson's first proceeding was to present Janet with a parcel of chocolate creams; the little girls had received a never-failing supply of these delights ever since

Felicia had taken them into her confidence. His next move was to draw near Cherry, and try to begin a conversation.

But Cherry, by reason of her newly-formed determination to speak to Mrs. Warland, was haughtier than ever that day. The more Mr. Johnson advanced, the more did she recede; and at last, urged on by Felicia's words and gestures, he passed the last bounds of courtesy and propriety, and made a rude snatch at Cherry's sunshade.

It was just at this moment that Felicia, who had been watching the little scene with intense amusement, suddenly turned and caught sight of someone whom the others did not see. It was the rector himself, brought to this spot by a violent head-ache, and hoping to be freshened by the sea-breezes. He had come, partly because his wife had entreated him to get some wholesome air, partly because he knew he should find his children picking up seaweed and shells. He had had a hard fight with the sinners in the slums, and had felt (as many an earnest worker has felt before him), that he hardly knew whether he had scored a victory or sustained a defeat. Above all things he wanted the refreshment of his little girls' company, and relied on them and their innocent talk to revive him, body and soul.

What he saw was an unseemly struggle (for so it seemed to his eyes) going on between the governess and

a strange young man. In the next instant, Felicia, with a very bright colour in her brown cheeks, ran up to him, and laid a coaxing hand upon his.

"Don't be angry, John," she entreated. "It's only Mr. Johnson; he has known Miss Dent ever since she came from school, and he admires her very much. She *is* pretty, you know. I suppose I ought not to have let him join us, but I did not mean to do any harm."

"Where does he come from? Who is he?" asked the rector, sternly.

"Oh, he is in lodgings somewhere. And he really seems to be quite nice, John."

Just then, Mr. Johnson, too, chanced to turn his head; and, obedient to a rapid sign from Felicia, he gravely lifted his hat to the ladies and the rector, and walked away. Mr. Warland came up to the flushed and trembling Cherry.

"Miss Dent," he said coldly; "I asked you to consider the serious nature of your duties when you undertook the care of my children. Are you proving yourself worthy of the trust which we have reposed in you?"

"Indeed I do my very best." Sobs were rising in the girl's throat, and her voice scarcely rose above a whisper.

"How did you become acquainted with the young man who has just left you?" the rector asked impatiently. "Is he known to your stepmother? You seem to be on very easy terms with him."

"I don't know him," cried Cherry, with a flush of just indignation. "It was Miss Kelly who had been walking with him. He is an utter stranger to me."

"Oh, Miss Dent!" The exclamation came from Felicia in a perfectly natural, shocked tone.

"If you don't know him your behaviour is even more extraordinary than it seemed at first." Mr. Warland was very stern, and his face was set ominously.

"It was not my fault," Cherry declared. "He came up to me in the rudest way, and made a snatch at my sunshade. I can only tell you again that I do not know him."

The rector's look plainly expressed horror. She was, he honestly believed, trying to put a bold face upon the matter. As to Felicia, she seemed to grow cooler as Cherry waxed hotter.

"She does not know what she is saying, John," she said in a quiet voice.

"Oh, how can you—how dare you be so base?" burst out Cherry in an agony; and then suddenly stopped, choked by her tears. A sense of utter helplessness overpowered her; of what use were her feeble protestations against Felicia's calm and deliberate falsehoods? She turned away, and hid her face in her hands.

The rector called the children, and began to walk homewards with them and Felicia. His headache was

worse than ever, and his mind was full of trouble and confusion. Was it not enough to contend with evil and folly in the parish? He surely had a right to expect propriety and straightforwardness in one who had become almost a member of his family. And yet it was very painful to him to see a woman crying, even when she was seriously to blame; for he was not a hard man at heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

"THOU ART SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR."

PERHAPS if the rector had gone back to Cherry, and spoken with her alone, she might have convinced him of her truthfulness. But Felicia kept close to his side, and talked to him in that innocent manner of hers which had deceived him from the beginning. And he really liked Felicia, first because she was his wife's sister, and he was devoted to his Caroline; and secondly, because she was so frank and bright, and took so great an interest in his concerns.

Miss Kelly had made up her mind to get rid of Cherry Dent, and have her replaced by someone whose conscientiousness and prudishness were not so troublesome. She was quite certain that Cherry would soon be telling tales to Mrs. Warland, and trying to make things disagreeable. Then, too, she disliked the girl, and resented the governess's superiority to herself. In look and style and

manner Miss Dent was utterly unlike Felicia, and her very quietness was intensely provoking.

Mrs. Warland, too, had always disliked Cherry from the first, but she was fully aware of the advantage of getting a governess who had come from Cedar House. And Felicia feared that it might be easier to make Cherry uncomfortable in her situation than to drive her out of it altogether.

"I wonder if Miss Dent will appear again to-day, Caroline?" she said, as she followed her sister into the study. The rector, much disturbed, had called his wife to him as soon as he came indoors.

"I cannot say I ever quite believed in her," remarked Mrs. Warland, when she had heard the story of the morning's adventures. "She had an air of holding herself above every one. But that kind of manner is very deceptive; girls who look proud will often stoop very low. I really don't know what to do in this case. We do not want to lose her."

"I did not think of dismissing her at present," said the rector. "But her falsehoods were quite appalling. If she had only confessed at once that she had forgotten herself, and flirted a little with an acquaintance, I could have forgiven her in a moment."

"I wonder who the man is? Does he really say that he has known her long?" Mrs. Warland asked.

"Not long. Felicia says that he has known and admired her ever since she left school," her husband replied.

Mrs. Warland's eyes sought her sister's with a penetrating look. Was Felicia's statement to be entirely depended upon ? Certain sentences in Jane's letters recurred to her mind at this moment. Jane had evidently found Felicia to be too clever for her in many ways. But the girl stood there looking perfectly bright and innocent, and the rector's wife (who was not of an affectionate nature) really had a good deal of warm feeling for Felicia. Jane was dull, and could not understand young people, she thought. She had never said a word to make her husband doubtful about this young sister of hers ; she had wanted him to like her, and he did.

"I daresay he isn't a bad young man, Caroline," Felicia said, with apparent good nature. "But even if there is no harm in Miss Dent, she is not a good governess. Of course she is clever and well educated, and all that sort of thing, but the children don't get on with her."

"Perhaps they would'nt get on any better with another," rejoined their mother, rather curtly. "One must not take notice of children's fancies. If you ever have any little girls of your own, Felicia, you will find them full of whims."

"Then you think we had better let the affair die out," said the rector in a tone of relief. "If she behaves well for the future, Caroline, we will try to forget all this disturbance. But we must be watchful."

"Oh, yes, we must be watchful, John; and we must always feel that we can't trust her."

"Perhaps she will be ashamed to come here this afternoon," said Felicia. "If she does not put in an appearance, Caroline, I will take charge of the children for the rest of the day."

"Really, Felicia is a most obliging girl," observed the rector, as his sister-in-law left the study. "It was shameful of Miss Dent to try to throw the blame on her. And Felicia answered her with admirable good temper."

But Cherry, after spending a quiet half-hour in her own room, calmed herself, and resolved to go resolutely back to the rectory, and take up her duties as usual. To her stepmother she merely said that she had a headache, which was quite enough to account for her unexpected return in the middle of the day. Mrs. Dent was not sympathetic; she could not see that the girl was enduring intense mental pain, and she only remarked that she hoped Cherry would not turn out to be delicate.

It was an unpleasant surprise to Felicia to see the governess walk in. Cherry's face was deadly pale, and still showed traces of weeping; but she was perfectly

composed, and went through the afternoon routine with quiet patience. But the work was not less trying because it was performed so calmly, and no one knew how thankful the poor girl was to be set free.

She was feeling too heartsick and worn just then to seek her little playfellow Walter, and she did not feel disposed to go straight back to Church Path. So she turned into one of the many lanes which led down to the sea, and seated herself on a piece of timber which was lying half in and half out of the water.

Fishermen were mending their nets close by; watermen were loitering about and waiting for fares; but no one took any heed of the tired girl who sat there busy with her own musings. Oh, what sad musings they were! She did not hear the men's rough voices as she gazed far out across the quiet sea. She was alone; unprotected and uncared for, away from the clasp of loving hands, beyond the sound of loving words. The water came washing over the old timber as if it invited her to leave the shore and its troubles, and trust herself to the broad bosom of the deep.

> "I said I will sail to my love this night
> On the other side of the world,"

thought Cherry, yearning for her absent friend, and looking with wistful eyes at a little yacht that was lying at anchor in the dreamy sunshine. When would Cissy's

CHERRY MAKES A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

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letter come to brighten this desolate life? When might she write and tell her the whole story of Arnold de Wilton and his half-acknowledged love?

There was an old boat, drawn up just out of reach of the tide, that served to screen Cherry from the eyes of the men who were loitering about the landing place. By glancing round its stern she could see the broad-chested fellows in dark blue jerseys and woollen caps; and suddenly she caught sight of little Walter's father among them. There was a look of his boy in his frank blue eyes, and his merry laugh was good to hear. But, in the very middle of a capital joke, he broke off to salute a young man in a grey tweed suit, who came slowly down to the water side.

The girl seated on the timber became as white as death, and trembled like a leaf. As the young man stepped lightly into Stevenson's boat she caught a full view of his face; and it was a face that she had last looked upon in the ball-room at Heatherdown. It was Arnold de Wilton who had seated himself in the stern-sheets, and Stevenson was rowing him away with strong steady strokes across the calm water.

Farther and farther away! The sea was shining in the lovely light of the late afternoon, and the dark old boat soon looked like a mere toy on that vast expanse of crystal; but Cherry followed it with straining eyes and

passionate longings. "I don't think you could ever escape me, even if you tried your hardest," he had said; and memory repeated the words in mockery to-day. How quickly and easily she had escaped him! Just one look towards the timber, and he would have seen the motionless figure sitting there.

He had not looked happy, she thought. Even her brief glimpse of him had shown her that his face seemed sharpened and worn. Perhaps at this very moment he was thinking of the girl whose young heart he had so quickly won. Perhaps—(ah, could it be possible?)—if everything were confessed, and if Cissy were to plead for pardon for her friend, he might look upon her again with the old tenderness. But no; the play was played out to the very end.

The sea began to take the first faint touches of sunset gold. A mist was creeping slowly over the water, and the little yacht showed faintly through the haze like a phantom ship. To Cherry, weary, heartsick, and confused in mind, it seemed as if she were surrounded by phantoms. The men had moved away, and the place was quite still.

She had read "Romola" in her school days; and now, as she sat here alone in her sorrow, the calm sea suggested such thoughts of peace as those that had come to Bardi's daughter in her desolation. She wanted to do as Romola

had done, and glide away over those quiet waters to some unknown shore where rest and comfort might be found. The idea took possession of her, and kept her chained to the spot long after the boat had vanished from her sight.

At last she rose, and went home with a strange feeling of being encompassed about with unrealities. Some minutes elapsed before her knock was answered, and then Rhoda's face appeared at the slowly opened door.

"Oh, is that you, Cherry?" she said with a yawn. "I suppose I've been dozing. Mother has gone shopping, and the kitchen fire is out. But you don't want any tea, do you?"

Sick and sad as she was, Cherry was still conscious that a cup of tea was the very thing she needed. But she answered in a dull tone that it did not matter.

"There is nothing that doesn't matter," cried Miss Croker, squeezing her small body inside the door before Rhoda had time to shut it. "I've got some wonderful Indian tea in my caddy, and I want Cherry to come and taste it. It has a flavour of rose leaves that is perfectly delicious. No, Rhoda, you need not try to open your sleepy eyes; the tea is for Cherry only."

"I don't want it," said Rhoda, drowsily; "unless you are going to make it here. But there is no fire in the kitchen."

"There is a fire in my kitchen;—come, Cherry!" The

tiny woman seized the tall girl with a resolute grasp; and the door closed upon them both.

"And now," said Miss Croker, after she had bustled about for a few minutes; "I want to know what is the matter with you, my poor darling. You've been getting whiter and whiter every day, and if there is one thing that Adelaide Croker can't stand, it is to see a pretty girl pine. Speak out, dearie, for heaven's sake, and ease your burdened heart!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

BREAKING FREE.

THUS urged, Cherry was moved to tell Miss Croker all about the state of things at the rectory, and was rewarded for her confidence by the little woman's hearty sympathy. But even Miss Croker, shrewd as she was, could hardly see a clear way out of the trouble.

"If that Kelly girl is to stay there, Cherry, I am afraid you will have to go," she said, thoughtfully.

"And if I leave the rectory I will never be a governess any more;" Cherry declared. "I shall get on well enough with Effie Comyn in London."

"Oh, my dear child;—the dressmaking?" Miss Croker threw up her tiny hands in dismay. "It will be such a blow to the Goodalls."

"They ought not to let it hurt them, Miss Croker. After all, as Cissy used to say, it is hardly fair to sacrifice one's vocation to the silly pride of one's relations. If

they only knew how many really well-born women are dressmakers nowadays, they would scarcely hate the business as bitterly as they do. But they don't know anything about the world and its ways, and they won't be enlightened."

" No, that's true; they won't be enlightened," repeated Miss Croker, with a little groan.

" Besides, I shall be miles away from Alderport;" Cherry went on. " I am not going to set up a dressmaking establishment under their very noses. They need not see me again. I should be sorry of course to say a final farewell to my uncle; but I don't care for Aunt Goodall and Emma in the least, and I am sure he would be a wiser man if they let him follow his own devices. He is often uncomfortable because he is so terribly genteel; and he can't enjoy the simple things that he longs for, because his wife detects vulgarity in them."

" All that you say is true enough, Cherry. But there is a great deal of gratitude due to Mr. Goodall; and I think you should try to walk in the path that he has chosen for you. I know you have a difficult part to play at the rectory, my dear; but don't leave your situation unless you are driven out of it."

" No, I will not leave it unless I am driven out of it," said Cherry, with a sigh.

Although Miss Croker was neither a Miss Noel nor a

Cissy Dysart, she was possessed of considerable powers of consolation, and was always ready with balm for her wounded neighbours. Poor Cherry was soothed and comforted by her friendship, and felt that Alderport was rendered more endurable by her presence in it. She was an atom of humanity with a big heart, and there was scarcely a man, woman, or child in her vicinity who had not profited by her kindliness. The rector, toiling away in the slums, was sometimes surprised to find traces of Miss Croker in the most unexpected places, and in more than one quarter he had discovered that she had prepared the way before him. Long ago she had known troubles of her own and had outlived them; and now the very memory of them was almost lost in the sorrows of those who lived near her. As for Cherry, she could scarcely sleep for thinking of the girl's perplexities, and wondering how she could find a way to help her out of them.

Cherry woke next morning with a tired feeling that was new to her healthy young body. She had an unusual longing to sink back again on her lumpy bed, instead of getting up and going to her daily work. But Mrs. Dent was not the woman to accept any excuses for self-indulgence if they were made by her stepdaughter, and Cherry fought resolutely against her weariness.

If she had been her usual self she might have noticed the look of the housemaid who opened the rectory door.

It was a look that conveyed a volume of sympathy, but Cherry did not see it; and in the next moment she was confronted by Mrs. Warland's stern face.

"The rector wishes to see you in the study, Miss Dent," said Mrs. Warland, leading the way to the dreaded room. Cherry followed with a slow step, and a forlorn consciousness that all the fates had arrayed themselves against her. She was, in a dull kind of way, prepared for another miserable scene; but she did not realize how sharp a trial awaited her that morning.

The rector was standing by the open window with a letter unfolded in his hand. Felicia stood by his side, and the ripe glow which usually made her face look fresh and bright was utterly wanting to-day. There was a half-frightened, half-defiant expression in her eyes as she met Cherry's glance, but she neither moved nor spoke.

"Miss Dent," began the rector in measured tones, "I have here an open letter which Felicia found under your chair in the school-room. It was folded in your handkerchief."

He handed letter and handkerchief to Cherry, who took them both. The latter was undoubtedly her own and was marked with her initials; she examined it in silence, and then ran her eyes rapidly over the letter.

"Mr. Warland," she said, lifting her pale face, and breaking the pause in a tremulous voice, "this letter was

never written to me. There is no one—no one in the whole world—who would write to me in such a manner."

The rector shook his head and glanced at his wife with a hopeless air.

"We have all read the letter," said Mrs. Warland, sharply; "and we know that it was not written to any of us. If it is not yours, how could it have been found under your chair, wrapped in your handkerchief?"

"I do not know," Cherry replied.

"Miss Dent," said the rector, solemnly; "I am not, I hope, an unforgiving man. I pass over the insulting epithets applied to myself and my wife in that letter,—I pass over the way in which you have abused our confidence in you,—but I cannot overlook your determination to be untruthful."

"I am not untruthful, Mr. Warland," Cherry answered, with forced calmness. "But I see that I can never succeed in convincing you of my sincerity. Again I tell you that the letter was not meant for me, and that is all that I can say about the matter."

"I do not know how we can continue to trust you with our children," said Mrs. Warland, her usually impassive face flushed with anger.

"I do not desire to be trusted with them any longer." Cherry's spirit had risen now, and she drew herself up to

her full height, and looked haughtily down upon the rector's wife. "It was a disastrous day for me when I entered this house, and I am going out of it for ever. A good man lived here once, who was my friend, and would have done me justice. You have not done me justice,—you refuse to hear me say a word in my own defence,—you openly accuse me of falsehood. As long as I live I will never cross your threshold again."

It was a most unexpected outburst. Cherry's manner was habitually so quiet, and the expression of her face so gentle, that the Warlands had looked upon her as a meek-spirited girl, capable of slyness, but not of temper. Even now, when they fully believed in her untrustworthiness, they had not quite made up their minds to part with her. They had thought to bring her into a state of submission and penitence.

Before they had collected themselves sufficiently to answer her she was gone. Gone,—out of the house and into the street, and they were left standing and looking at each other in astonishment. The rector was the first to speak. "Caroline," he said, uneasily; "can there be any possibility of a mistake? I did not expect to find her so firm. If we have, indeed, done her an injustice ——"

"Oh, John," interrupted his wife, impatiently; "you know there can be no mistake. Just let me go over the

matter again. This morning, before breakfast, I happened to go into the school-room, and found Felicia there alone. She was standing with her back to the door, reading a letter, and did not hear me come in. It surprised me to see her reading a letter so intently, because I knew there had not been any for her by post. I need not remind you that I always unlock the letter-box and take out its contents myself. To-day there were five letters, three for you and one for each of the servants."

The rector nodded; and Felicia, listening with dilated eyes, grew paler and paler.

"I went up quietly to Felicia, and looked over her shoulder," Mrs. Warland went on. "And then, of course, I was quite shocked to find that she had got a love-letter in her hand, and such a gushing epistle, too! I said—'Felicia, who has been writing such atrocious stuff?' And she turned round with a start."

"You did startle me very much," remarked Miss Kelly, drawing a long breath. "You are so cat-like in your movements, Caroline."

"Don't mention cats," cried her sister, angrily. "Didn't the wretch who wrote the letter call me an old cat? And did he not call my husband a bull of Bashan? Can there be any worse names, I should like to know?"

"Never mind the names," Mr. Warland interposed.

"But I do mind them John. And then Felicia

showed me that deceitful girl's handkerchief, and told me she had picked up letter and handkerchief under the chair. The letter has no date and no cover. Doubtless Miss Dent received it yesterday (probably before she met the man on the beach), and carried it in her pocket."

"I will find out where the fellow lives, and speak to him," said the rector. "The girl is fatherless; some one must look after her interests. I think I will call on her step-mother this afternoon."

"Oh, John, why not let her alone? We are all so glad that she is gone!" sighed Felicia.

"My dear Felicia, I am not sent here to let people alone. It is my duty to run after them and save them against their will," said the rector, gravely.

"I know you are very good, John, but Miss Dent is too deep for you," said Felicia, with a distressed look. "I am afraid she may make you believe her innocent and take her back; and then we shall have this dreadful scene over again."

"She shall never be taken back," declared Mrs. Warland, viciously.

But Felicia was exceedingly uncomfortable. The letter which had caused the disturbance had come to her that very morning in an envelope addressed to Eliza, the housemaid; and she had slipped into the school-room to read it in peace. But the door was easily unclosed, and

Caroline's steps had been noiseless, and she was caught with the letter in her hand. It was true that she had picked up poor Cherry's handkerchief, and it had swiftly occurred to her to say that the letter had been found in its folds. But things had by no means taken the course that she had intended. Fortune was favouring her at present; Mr. Johnson had contented himself with using endearing terms without her Christian name, and so the note might as well have been written to any other woman; but Eliza was in her confidence, and might reveal all.

Felicia Kelly was possessed of a little money of her own which had been left to her by a godmother; and this had given her importance in the eyes of her sisters. But, young as she was, they had already found out that she was likely to become the family difficulty; and although Caroline did not mistrust her, she watched her with jealous eyes. Girls who had money were sure to be followed by undesirable men. Mrs. Warland had married a good man herself, and she wanted to get her sister happily settled.

But Felicia, light-headed as she seemed, really had taken a strong liking to the young man who was known to her as Fred Johnson; and had enjoyed many a stroll with him through the lonely lanes of Willowford before she came to Alderport. She had even thought it possible

that the Warlands might learn to like him too; but it was not easy to explain to them how the acquaintance had begun. They would want to know all about Mr. Johnson's family and belongings; but he did not appear to have any ties at all. And, although he devoted himself assiduously to Felicia, he had never suggested that she should introduce him to her friends at the rectory. On the whole, he seemed to prefer out-of-door meetings, and love-making under difficulties; and Felicia herself confessed that stolen waters were sweet.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DRIFTING AWAY.

"WHY, Cherry, what have you come back for?" asked Mrs. Dent, eyeing her step-daughter with a suspicious air. "I hope you are not getting tired of your situation."

"I have left it," Cherry answered in the weary tone that she often used of late. "I am sorry, mother; but it was impossible to stay with the Warlands. I must get something else to do."

"You are a rolling stone, Cherry; that's what you are!" said the widow indignantly. No sooner are you in a place than you get out of it; and that's how it will be with you to the end of the chapter. What will your uncle Barnaby say?"

"If uncle Barnaby knew everything, mother, he would not condemn me."

"Ah, ah, you are always right in your own eyes. You hold your head too high, and believe too much in yourself;

I know your faults, but it does no good to tell you of them. Even Adelaide Croker will not take your part now."

"I want to see Miss Croker," said Cherry, moving towards the door. "I think I will go to her at once."

"If you were in your right mind, Cherry," Mrs. Dent replied scornfully; "you'd remember that Miss Croker won't be home till to-morrow morning. She went away after breakfast. She takes a whole day and a night when she goes to see her people in the next county."

"I remember now," said the girl, putting her hand up to her forehead. "My head is a little confused, I am afraid. I have had so many troubles lately."

"Troubles of your own making," cried Mrs. Dent. "You've had a good start in life; but those that have the best start often make the worst finish. Look at Rhoda; she's never had much money spent on her education, but she doesn't give me an uneasy moment. Now do let us know all about the matter;—did they tell you to go, or did you leave of your own accord?"

"I was falsely accused, mother, and I said I must leave them."

"And what did they accuse you of, pray?"

"Need I tell you everything now?" asked Cherry, turning her colourless face towards her questioner. "I think, mother, you must see that I have been sorely tried."

"You flew into a passion and gave yourself a headache," said the widow, quite unmoved.

Slowly and wearily Cherry toiled up the narrow stairs, and shut herself into her little room. Her head was aching indeed, but she forced herself to get out pen and paper, and write a brief note to Effie Comyn. She told her friend to expect her arrival in the course of a day or two; and when the letter was finished she put on her hat again, and went out to carry it to the post.

It was now the beginning of October; but the autumn was as soft and balmy as summer. The old town seemed to be glorified in the calm light and still atmosphere, and the few golden leaves that had drifted down from the trees were the only visible tokens of decay. The letter posted, Cherry turned her steps to Stevenson's cottage, and stayed a little while to talk to Walter's mother. The good woman's homely kindness soothed her, and the sweet air, creeping up from the sea, was refreshing. She walked down to the water's edge, and lingered there before she went back to Church Path.

It seemed to her that the troubled morning had passed like a dream. The church clock was striking twelve as she entered Mrs. Dent's gate, and the postman came up at the same moment. He handed her a letter addressed to herself in Miss Noel's handwriting.

Her sad heart gave a throb of thankfulness. Faithful

friends were still left in the world, and there was no need for utter despair. Too impatient for news to wait till she was indoors, she opened the letter as she walked up the little garden path, and read the first lines in the sunshine.

"My Dear Cherry,—I am afraid you have not received the sad tidings published in the newspapers. If you had, I feel assured that your first impulse would have been to write to me. It is therefore my painful task to tell you that our dear Cissy died on her voyage to India.

"A letter has come from Mrs. Hope, telling me the little that there is to tell. Our Cissy did not suffer; she passed away in her sleep; and her last words, spoken before going to rest, were words of happiness and peace. She had been sitting on the deck, and watching the setting sun; and she had talked of the years spent at Cedar House, and the loving hearts that were left behind in England. 'I have seen their faces in fancy this evening,' she said, 'and something tells me that I have not bidden them a long goodbye. I shall go back to them, perhaps, sooner than I thought. Anyhow I feel a sense of comfort and hope to-night.'

"This is all, dear Cherry. I know how heavily the blow will fall on you; and as I write I pray that you may be comforted. I wish you were by my side now; but you will feel that I am with you in spirit. When

you can leave Alderport you will come to me; and believe me always,—Your affectionate friend, CLARA NOEL."

Cherry did not knock at the door; but it was thrown open suddenly. Mrs. Dent, her face deep red, and her eyes shining with anger, attacked her at once.

"Oh you wicked, sly girl!" she began. "The rector has been here, telling me everything. Where did you first meet that good-for-nothing scamp who has been writing to you? Is that letter from him? If it is ——"

"It is a letter from Miss Noel." With a strange look, Cherry pushed her step-mother back, and pointed to the signature. "Cissy Dysart is dead; Cissy, my friend, is dead!"

Her voice was so clear and high that it reached Rhoda, who was sitting in the parlour, and startled her out of her habitual apathy. She came up to her mother, and pulled her away from the door.

"Let Cherry come in quietly," she said. "Something very bad has happened, and there's trouble coming. I wish the rector had not come here telling tales; and I do wish that Miss Croker would return early this evening and set us all to rights."

Mrs. Dent mechanically obeyed her daughter, and drew back to let Cherry enter. The girl passed her without even giving her a glance, and went straight upstairs.

It was such a wonderful thing for Rhoda to exert herself that Mrs. Dent was overcome with astonishment. Moreover she was really alarmed by the look in Cherry's face, and began to wish that her step-daughter had never come back to Church Path at all. All through the rest of that weary day they left her alone in her room; but Rhoda still further astonished her mother by going upstairs twice with refreshments. The night set in, and the widow and her daughter went to bed; but Cherry neither undressed nor lay down to rest.

It was a calm, lovely night, so warm that her window was wide open, so still that not a breath of wind was astir. Cherry was sitting motionless on the large school trunk that filled up one end of her little room; she was not weeping, she had not shed a single tear since she had received Miss Noel's letter. Of that letter she had only read the opening lines, and then she had folded it up and put it into the bosom of her gown.

The small house was hot and close; she could scarcely breathe in it, and no thoughts of peace could come to her while she was pent up within its walls. As she sat there she was possessed with an uncontrollable desire for space and freedom. Her head was dizzy and confused; she had repeated over and over to herself that Cissy was dead, until the words seemed to have no meaning in them. If she could only escape from the stifling room and go

down to the beach, her brain might become clear once more.

Suddenly she rose and took from its peg a large black cashmere cloak, lined with grey fur, which had once belonged to her lost friend. She wanted to wear something that Cissy had worn, and she wrapped herself in its ample folds, and pulled the hood over her head. Then with light steps, she crept down the narrow stairs, unbolted the house-door, and went forth quietly into the moonlight.

Even in daytime Church Path was a retired place, and at night it was perfectly still. With a half-formed resolution in that bewildered mind of hers, the girl hastened past the silent houses, and took her way towards the landing-place where she had seen Arnold de Wilton on the preceding evening. There was small fear of meeting any one in the narrow lane that led down to this spot; on both sides rose the dark walls of wharves; no one lived here, and few even came here after dusk. She had a vague idea that she had seen a little boat fastened to a stake near the landing, and wondered if it were there still?

Yes, it was there; a small, battered, old boat rocking gently on the water that washed the rough little pier. The tide was going out; and if one could only loosen the boat, one might drift away over that silver sea to quietness and rest.

Again she thought of Romola, and fancied herself gliding over the calm waters to some haven of repose, where there might be a new life awaiting her. If not life, perhaps death; had not Cissy gone to her last sleep in the cool deeps of ocean? The thought was so sweet that it drew her nearer and nearer to the edge of the landing, and at last she stretched out her hand to the boat, and pulled it close to the pier. Then she stepped in, and felt in her pocket for the pen-knife that she had always carried in her school-days. The old rope was rotten, and the knife soon cut it through.

And so she was free, drifting away over the moonlit water, just as she had often drifted in dreams. She was not quite sure whether she was awake or only dreaming now. The gentle gliding motion gave her a delightful sense of calm; the soft night air breathed on her face like a caress. Presently she lay down in the boat, just as Romola had done, wrapping the large cloak around her, and closing her eyes; and then, indeed, she entered into dreamland.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HAVEN.

DR. MORNAY, walking down the garden in the morning sunshine, congratulated himself on having four weeks of leisure and rest still before him. Here was another lovely day, fresh, calm, and golden ; the air was laden with the scent of mignonette, and there were even some roses lingering here and there. It was early ; his two sisters had not yet left their rooms, and he was sauntering along the garden path alone.

He was a tall man with a powerful face, expressive of strong good sense and kindliness. He looked more like a French abbé than an English clergyman, and moved with a certain easy dignity and grace. At sixty he was a bachelor, well contented with his condition, and thoroughly happy in the work that he had to do. An enviable man, perhaps; better satisfied with his lot than most people, and endowed with the good gift of enjoying every simple pleasure that came in his way.

The garden ended in a narrow strip of beach, with the sea washing gently over its many-coloured pebbles; and just here there was a sunny little creek where a small boat was lying still. Mr. Mornay looked, and saw that a woman, wrapped in a large cloak, was reclining in the boat, with the hood drawn partly over her head. And then he waded a little way into the water, and drew the boat higher up on the shore.

When he softly pushed back the hood from the young face, and gazed at its pale beauty, he was more startled and surprised than he had ever been in his life. How had it come to pass that a lady (for such she seemed) could have been sent adrift in a crazy little boat like this? She appeared to be lying in a kind of stupor, with eyes closed, and not a trace of colour in lips or cheeks. He was a wise man, with plenty of that sort of wisdom which is always ready for immediate use; and he did not waste time in conjecture, but lifted her up in his strong arms, and carried her straight into the house.

Miss Mornay was coming downstairs, and met her brother in the hall with his burden. He was leaving a trail of water behind him, as he bore the girl slowly into the breakfast room, and deposited her on a large old-fashioned sofa.

Dora Mornay was a stately, well-kept woman of fifty, who owed the preservation of her good looks mainly to

MR. MORNAY FINDS CHERRY IN THE DRIFTED BOAT.

the fact that she never made a fuss about anything. When she saw her brother with a helpless girl in his arms, she did not scream, but quietly followed him into the room, and said in a composed voice—

"Where did you find her, Edward?"

And he answered with equal composure—

"In a boat that has drifted into our creek."

Then Dora Mornay called the servants, and suggested that Edward should go away and take breakfast in another room while they brought the girl to consciousness. Presently Lucilla Mornay came downstairs, and gave them her aid with a firmness that was not, perhaps, quite as real as her sister's. For Lucilla, at forty, was still regarded as a little girl, and no one expected too much from her.

But it was upon Lucilla's face that Cherry's gaze first rested when her eyes unclosed at last; and it was a very pleasant face to look upon. The girl saw the face faintly, as if it had been veiled with mist, and yet the sight of it gave her a vague kind of comfort. Then the mist thickened; and did not clear away again till she found herself lying on a soft bed, and fancied that she was back once more at Heatherdown.

She tried to turn her head to take a survey of the room, and discovered that the effort was too great for her strength. Lucilla came instantly to her side, and bent over her.

"I don't quite know where I am," said Cherry in a poor little whisper, which was all the voice she had.

"You are staying with friends," answered Lucilla, in a soft cooing tone. "And it is time to take some beef-tea, my dear."

Cherry drank the beef-tea obediently, and fell asleep soon afterwards. And then, by degrees, the strength came back, and the question, "Where am I?" was repeated.

The Mornays told her everything as carefully as they could. The boat, after all, had not drifted very far from Alderport, and yet it had carried her into a new world.

It had been easy enough to find out who Cherry was, for they had found Miss Noel's letter in her bosom, with her name and address on the cover. And Dora had read the letter, and had written to Miss Noel; and Edward had gone to Alderport and called on Mrs. Dent.

Mrs. Dent, really bewildered and troubled, had poured out all her perplexities into Mr. Mornay's ears; and Miss Croker had come, with an outburst of righteous indignation, to stand up for Cherry against the whole world. Mr. Mornay listened to everything that was said, and drew his own conclusions. And then came a long letter from Miss Noel, which convinced him that his poor waif was worthy of all care and tenderness.

Two weeks went by while Cherry was wandering in a

land of phantoms; but she was tended all the while by skilful hands, and watched by kind eyes. And when her senses returned, and all the sorrow of her young life came rushing back upon her heart like a flood, they bore her up, for they were well skilled in the art of sustaining and comforting.

"When you are strong enough," said Dora, with her grand air of calm decision, "you will come back with us to London. We have heard from Miss Comyn, and she is expecting you; but you will not be able to work yet. For a time you will go to stay with Miss Noel at Cedar House. What a happy girl to have so many friends!"

"Yes," assented Cherry with a little sigh. She could not help remembering the two dearest friends who were lost to her for ever.

Being young and strong she recovered rapidly, and the sympathetic minds around her aided her progress in a hundred subtle ways. There was nothing to jar upon the nerves that had sustained so severe a shock; not a word was spoken in her presence that was not sweet and calm. Nor was she ever tormented by the sense of being under an obligation. The Mornays were not absolutely rich, but they were people in easy circumstances, and could afford the luxury of doing kind things. They enjoyed taking care of her, and felt a genuine pleasure in her beauty. Moreover they were accustomed to do good, and

it had become their natural occupation to care for others. All this they allowed her to see; and her perfect confidence in them and their goodness helped her to get well.

Meanwhile at the rectory there were troubled minds, for Felicia had become deeply interested in her dangerous game, and sometimes went so far as to ask herself how it would end? Her influence over her little nieces was unbounded; but Mrs. Warland had begun to watch her sister closely, and there were no more strolls on the shore with Mr. Johnson. A young person in the town had been engaged to fill Miss Dent's place; but she was modestly incompetent, and the children certainly did not obey her as they had obeyed Cherry. Felicia spoke seriously of devoting herself to study, and often shut herself up in her own room in the evenings with her school-books. As to the rector, he had abandoned his intention of seeking Mr. Johnson. Mrs. Dent had told him that her step-daughter was ill, and that she had found friends who would take her back with them to London. His heart sometimes smote him when he thought of the poor girl; but he was a busy man, and every hour of his life was crowded with duties.

Nearly three weeks had gone by since Cherry had drifted away in her boat; and Miss Croker, although she could never forget her favourite, was then as busy as

the rector. Autumn generally brought sickness to Alderport, and there were two or three invalids in Stevenson's cottage. Granny Stevenson was seriously ill; little Walter and the baby were both ailing, and all required such constant attention by night and day that the poor mother was nearly worn out. So Miss Croker came to the rescue, and acted as night-nurse to give the weary woman the chance of getting some sleep.

It was another still night, dark and misty and close—too close, thought Miss Croker, to be quite wholesome. The church clock was striking twelve as she came out of the waterman's cottage, and turned her steps homeward. All her patients were doing well,—so well that she felt it was safe to leave them, and go quietly back to her own pillow.

Miss Croker was a tough little person, but the soft warm air, so thick and heavy, had made her more languid than usual, and frequent night-watches had told upon her nerves. There was not a sound to be heard; when the last stroke of the clock had died away the stillness seemed strangely profound, and the little woman involuntarily quickened her pace as she plunged into the deep darkness of the narrow lane.

Just as she was passing the church, her heart gave a great throb of terror; and then, in the next instant, she scolded herself for being a fool. Yet it had certainly

seemed to her that a gleam of light, faint and transitory, had suddenly shone out of the disused door of the old vestry.

When the church had been restored they had changed the position of the vestry, and built it on the right side of the chancel instead of on the left. But the old door, which had once admitted the clergyman, still remained, although it was never used, and had probably not been unclosed for years; and it was from this entrance that Miss Croker fancied she had seen the light.

As soon as she was close to the door her natural courage returned in an unaccountable way; and instead of hurrying past it she paused. Timid a moment ago, she was now quite firm and composed; and resolved to satisfy herself, she gave the door a gentle push. It yielded and opened.

Silent as a shadow she stole inside, and found herself under the gallery, and among the free seats where the poor people sat on Sundays. There was indeed a light in the church, proceeding from a small lantern which was placed upon the pulpit stairs. At the foot of the stairs two persons were standing close together, talking in low tones; and Miss Croker crept a little nearer to them. One was a man; the other a woman. Oh, if she could only see their faces! She crept a little nearer yet.

Chance favoured her; the woman, tired of standing,

suddenly sat down on the stairs, thus bringing her face just under the light of the lantern. Miss Croker's sharp eyes recognized her at once. It was Cherry's enemy, Felicia Kelly, who had come stealthily into the empty church at midnight to meet a lover.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BUSY NIGHT.

MISS CROKER'S resolution was taken in an instant. She glided like a cat out of the church without making the slightest noise, and then set off running to the rectory at the top of her speed. And Miss Croker could run like a deer; she had no superfluous flesh to carry, and bounded over the ground at an astonishing rate. Not a single human being did she meet on her way; the neighbourhood was so quiet that it was difficult to believe how near it was to a populous town. She reached the rectory without any hindrance, and gave the bell handle a vigorous pull.

A tremendous peal resounded through the house, awaking most of the inmates out of their sleep. The rector was the only person out of bed, and he was just preparing to go to rest. When the day's work had been heavier than usual, it was his custom to write his letters in the dressing-room that adjoined his bedroom, and he had got

ready a goodly pile for the morning post when that clamorous peal assailed his ears. There would be no sleep for him that night, he thought. His wife, who had been slumbering soundly, started up in a fright.

"There must be a fire, John," she said, excitedly.

"I will go down and see who is at the door," he answered. "Don't alarm yourself, Caroline. I daresay it is a summons to a sick person."

But Caroline could not help being alarmed, and when she found that her husband was in talk with some one in the entry, she put on her dressing-gown and went to the head of the stairs. In the next moment he came up, and spoke in an anxious tone.

"Caroline, is Felicia in her room ?"

"Felicia ! Of course she is," replied Mrs. Warland, in great astonishment. But there was a sudden exclamation behind her, and Eliza's voice murmured distressfully—

"Oh, dear, oh, dear ! I always thought it would come out."

The servants, awakened by the bell, had come down from their attics, and the three little girls had got up. Mrs. Warland pushed them all aside, and went hastily to her sister's room. It was empty, and the bed was undisturbed.

"John," she began, wringing her hands in real anguish.

But he did not stop to hear a word. The hall door closed behind him with a loud bang; and his wife went back to her chamber to bear the misery of suspense alone. She had a vague conviction that Eliza could tell something, but she could not question the housemaid just then. In her heart of hearts there had always lurked a small restless doubt of Felicia.

And now, as she was really a good woman, her conscience began to smite her with sharp strokes. If Felicia had been a deceiver from the first, how shamefully they had dealt with Miss Dent! The governess was an orphan, and one who had to earn her own bread. And they had loaded her with reproaches and driven her away from their door in desperation. Mrs. Warland was terrified at this new view of Cherry's case. She thought of her own little daughters; suppose a time should come when Janet should be sent into the world to get her living. Suppose that she should fall in with hard people, and be distrusted and wrongfully accused. Perhaps there would be retribution, and some one might make her child as miserable as she had made Cherry Dent

And then she did the best thing that she could possibly do, and fell on her knees to ask that all her mistakes might be forgiven. Poor Mrs. Warland would never forget this night as long as she lived; and she never could be quite such a wooden woman again.

Meanwhile Miss Croker and the rector were hurrying on through the darkness to the church. The rectory was only a little way off, yet Miss Croker hardly hoped to find the pair exactly where she had seen them first. But, as before, the door yielded with a gentle little push, and the couple were faintly discerned by the light of their small lantern;—Felicia still seated on the pulpit stairs, and the man still standing near her, and talking in a whisper.

Mr. Warland was not as noiseless as Miss Croker, and they both heard his approach. The girl started up, and her companion drew back several paces cautiously, with the stealthy motion of one accustomed to be on the watch for surprises. But the rector made an impetuous bound which landed him by the man's side.

"Who are you?" he demanded angrily. "Felicia, how dare you meet this person here? Who is he?"

Felicia, stricken dumb with terror, clung to the hand-rail of the stairs to support her trembling limbs. And Mr. Johnson made a few more rapid steps backward, as if he would retreat into the deep gloom of the middle aisle; but the rector, with another bound, seized him impetuously by the arm.

"You shall not escape me," he cried. "I will find out all about you! I will never let you go till I know——"

The sentence was not finished. With a dexterous jerk

the young man freed his arm, and, quick as lightning, struck the rector a blow on the head. Without a word Mr. Warland dropped instantly to the ground.

A loud shriek from Felicia resounded through the empty church; but Miss Croker, horrified as she was, kept her wits as usual. She knelt down by the prostrate man and did her best to restore consciousness, begging Felicia to run to the rectory for assistance. But the girl was worked up to a wild pitch of misery and excitement, and could do nothing but scream. Her lover had made his escape; her deceit was discovered; life would be unbearable for the future. The rector came to his senses at last, and found Miss Croker tying up his wounded head with her handkerchief, and Felicia still wailing like a banshee.

"How did they get into the church?" he asked, feebly, as he sat up, leaning against Miss Croker for support. The same question had already occurred to the little woman herself; the door by which they had effected an entrance had long been disused; but a key must have been found to fit the lock.

"Who has got the key?" she said, sharply addressing Felicia Kelly. "Have you got it still, or has he gone off with it?"

But there was only a prolonged moan in reply.

Then a spirit of fury seemed suddenly to possess Miss

Croker, and give her the strength of two or three women twice her size. She left the rector, and made a spring at Felicia, and shook and slapped her with all her might.

"Speak!" she cried. "What have you done with the key? I'll never leave off shaking you and slapping you till you do speak, even if we stay here till to-morrow night."

"He took it," gasped the wretched girl at last.

"I thought so," said Miss Croker. "And it's my belief that he'll take the church plate too, if we don't keep a sharp watch. Mr. Warland, do you think you can walk home if you are supported by this admirable young lady and myself?"

"I will try," he answered.

Felicia, thoroughly subdued by Miss Croker's prompt and salutary treatment, lent her strong arm to her brother-in-law; and the resolute little woman, having seized the lantern, cautiously led the way out into the open air. Between them they managed to get Mr. Warland to the rectory in safety; but even then Miss Croker's business was not ended. She despatched Eliza to the sexton, who lived close by, and could not rest until she knew that he had gone to the police station.

The grey autumn morning was breaking slowly and sullenly over Alderport, and its faint light fell on three haggard faces in Felicia's bed-room. The rector, lying ill

and in pain in his own room, had had his head properly bandaged by the doctor, and was now left in quietness. But Mrs. Warland knew that there must be a full confession forced from her sister, and nerved herself as bravely as she could for her miserable task. She felt it only just that Miss Croker should be present in the interests of the falsely accused Cherry Dent.

Miss Croker was aching with weariness from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot; all her little curls were limp and straggling, and all the lines in her face were deepened. Under each of her dauntless eyes there was a black mark which looked as if it had been made by a coal-heaver's finger; but she was as upright as a dart, and sat firmly on her chair, determined not to leave the room till Cherry was fully and completely vindicated.

As to Felicia, she was scarcely to be recognized as the gay, impertinent girl who had planted thorns in the path of the governess. All her bright colour had vanished, and her face looked strangely pinched and worn. Never had the resemblance between the two sisters been so apparent as it was to-day; for it is a fact that trouble, joy, or emotion of any kind will often bring out an unsuspected likeness between near relatives. It is in their moments of agitation that brothers and sisters show that they are of the same blood.

"First of all, Felicia," said Mrs. Warland, clearing her

throat, and clasping her hands on her lap; "I must know who that man is, and how you first knew him?"

"His name is Johnson," Felicia answered, in a tired voice. "I first met him at Willowford, when I was walking in the lanes."

"Was he not introduced to you?"

"No; he introduced himself."

"Did Jane know of the acquaintance?"

"No."

"Did you let him know that you were coming here?"

"No; I met him accidentally on the Barrack Road."

"Now, Felicia, you must be aware that a great many falsehoods have been told. Speak the truth, and tell us if this man Johnson had ever known Miss Dent?"

"He had seen her walking with the children, and thought her a pretty girl; that was all."

"And that letter which I found you reading — was it written to you or to her?"

"It was written to me."

"Oh, Felicia!"

Mrs. Warland passed her hand over her worn face, and sighed heavily. Miss Croker gave a little snort of triumph.

"As to the letter, it was your own fault that I laid the blame on Miss Dent," said Felicia. "You came stealing

into the school-room in that cat-like way of yours, and took me by surprise, Caroline."

"How did you get the letter?" asked the rector's wife, suppressing another sigh.

"It came in a cover addressed to Eliza."

Mrs. Warland paused, and looked so utterly spent that Miss Croker took the business into her own hands, and asked the next question herself.

"Did Mr. Johnson suggest a meeting in the church?" she inquired, fixing her sharp, bird-like eyes on the girl's face. Daring as she had been, Felicia was thoroughly cowed now, and was really beginning to be afraid of this energetic little spinster. She replied quite meekly.

"Yes; he asked if I could get the keys, and I told him I could not, but afterwards ——"

"Well, afterwards?"

"Afterwards I saw two or three rusty keys in a cupboard in the study, and I gave them to him. He had noticed the disused door, and he tried the keys one evening and found that one would fit the lock. Then he told me in a letter to meet him at the church last night, and I did."

"And now," said Miss Croker, holding Felicia's arm with her strong little fingers, and speaking very impressively; "tell me at once—without prevarication, mind! —did he begin to question you about the church plate?"

"Yes," answered Felicia, turning paler than ever. "He wanted to know exactly where it was kept, and I told him that it was in an iron safe in the vestry. I told him, too, that the rector kept the key of that safe, and never let it go out of his possession. And he said he had heard that the plate belonging to our church was very costly—much more costly than church plate usually is."

"He seems to have been well informed," remarked Miss Croker, with a grim smile. "Did he propose that you should get hold of the rector's key and let him peep into the safe?"

"He did." Felicia was now so white that the two women thought she was going to faint. "And that frightened me a little. He was just beginning to urge it very much when you and John came upon us."

Miss Croker's face began to soften visibly. She let the girl's arm go, and took her hand in a kindly clasp.

"I don't believe," she said, "that you would have done again what you did last night, even if we had not discovered you. I believe that you felt you had gone too far, and that you were beginning to distrust the man. Is not this true?"

"It is true," Felicia whispered.

"And I don't see," continued Miss Croker, "why this wretched story should ever be noised abroad. Eliza knows most; and as I once nursed her through a bad

illness I think I can make her hold her peace. When all our excitement has subsided, and the rector is himself again, we shall feel that we must just start afresh, and avoid old mistakes. Some people are so silly that they keep on committing the same blunders over and over; but we won't do that, will we? We will be more circumspect in future" (this with a glance at Felicia) "and more charitable" (with a glance at Mrs. Warland), "and then we shall all be surprised to find how well we get through life."

"You are a good woman, Miss Croker," said the rector's wife, with tears running down her cheeks. "As soon as my husband gets well he will see Miss Dent, and make a full apology; and I will write a letter asking for her forgiveness. And if we can only hush up this matter, and Felicia will stay here and be a better girl ——"

"I'd rather go away," murmured Felicia, sobbing.

"No, no," exclaimed Miss Croker, patting her shoulder. "It will be best and wisest for you to stay here. Start afresh, as I have said; go to work at the sewing machine; take up some of the housekeeping duties; write the rector's letters for him; and lead a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of God's holy name. Amen."

With these words, and a promise to return soon, Miss Croker rose and went her way. Church Path was still quiet in the early morning when she opened her own

door, and found herself at home again. With a long sigh of relief she went up into her little room, and lay down, with a thankful heart, to take her much-needed rest. Nor did she wake until the day had far advanced, and her small servant was peeping anxiously in.

CHAPTER XXVII.

VOICES.

MR. JOHNSON was never seen again; nor was any attempt made to break into the church. The disused door was bricked up, and none of the parishioners ever knew how deeply Felicia Kelly had been concerned in the mysterious affair. In the town it was generally believed that Miss Croker had discovered the burglar and had given notice at the rectory; and the rector, rashly venturing into the church without assistance, had got a blow on the head.

It came out afterwards that a young man, answering to Mr. Johnson's description, had been suspected of being concerned in the burglary at Willowford. There was small doubt that he had connected himself with a gang; but it was supposed that in Alderport he had meant to do a little robbery on his own account. Finding how easy it was to obtain a strong influence over Felicia, he had intended to use her as his tool; but the girl, wildly rash

and reckless as she had been, was not so entirely his slave as he had supposed her to be. And in looking back upon the affair it often seemed to her as if it had been a bad dream. Anyhow, the results of the matter were satisfactory; nothing else could have so effectually sobered Felicia, and wrought so great a change in her manner and conduct. Whether there was an inward change it was difficult to tell. Felicia was not the woman to live up to a high standard; she would never be quite truthful and sincere, but would go through life telling little fibs and practising little deceptions to the very end. Still, she had been thoroughly frightened, and the terror had produced a good effect.

The whole thing was merely a nine days' wonder in the town, although the churchwardens, the old sexton, and everybody who had anything to do with the church, were blamed for leaving the disused door without any better protection than an old lock. But as there was always a talk of pulling down this ugly Georgian edifice, and building a fair new Gothic fane, no one had concerned himself much about the state of the church; and many defects and deficiencies had been carelessly passed over. The midnight adventure had revived the desire of a new church in the minds of the townsfolk, and they were now heartily disposed to carry out their plan.

Cherry still an invalid under the care of her new

friends, received one or two visitors in the breakfast-room. She had been brought downstairs and placed on the large old sofa, where Mr. Mornay had first laid her when he had carried her in from the boat. Her callers were only allowed to stay a little while; and the first person she was permitted to see was Miss Croker.

Then, when she was fast gaining strength, the rector came with a wan face, and strips of plaster on his head. He asked Cherry's pardon so humbly that she could hardly answer him for tears. And then, for the first time, she had a full view of all the real goodness of the man; his earnest love of right, and his hatred of wrong; and she felt a new interest in his work, and a new respect for his character. But there was one thing that she could not do, although his pleading moved her deeply.

"I am not fit to be a governess," she said frankly. "I cannot come back and take up my duties just where I laid them down. I think now that I was wrong in even having undertaken them. Not wrong because I did not know enough to teach, but because I have not the gift of imparting knowledge. Nor can I lead and guide girls' minds as some can lead and guide them. If one is to work well, one must find one's own life-work."

"I am sorry you are not coming back to us," he answered. "We longed to make amends for the past. But I will not urge you to act against your convictions.

498

UNCLE BARNABY VISITS HIS NIECE.

Only remember that you have friends at the rectory,—friends whom you have made happy by forgiving them."

Uncle Barnaby was the next visitor; and he was harder to manage than the rector. He could not be satisfied with Cherry's decision, and deplored the blindness that had made her throw away a good chance.

"Hample apologies have been made," he said. "If they hadn't been hample, I wouldn't have asked you to go back. You left in sorrow, and might return in glory. Think of that! Why, there's nothing they wouldn't do for you now. I've seen the rector, and he swallowed more humble pie in five minutes than I've ever eaten in the course of my whole life. It's a dish I ain't fond of; veal-and-'am pie for me! But your aunt won't hear of 'am. Come, Cherry, you're young; let an old head judge for you."

Cherry did not say that she thought a good deal of life's misery was made by old heads judging for young ones. She only replied, somewhat sadly, that she wished she could follow his advice.

"But I cannot, uncle; indeed, I cannot," she said, laying her slender hands on his. "You don't want to make me unhappy? I have had a great deal of trouble lately, and I can't bear any more. Let me go away, and begin work afresh in another place. I cannot stay in Alderport."

Uncle Barnaby studied her in silence for a moment, and gravely nodded his head.

"Mrs. Dent is not the woman to be pleasant to a step-daughter," he remarked. "I dessay she's got something to do with your wish to go away. But if she's been hard on you, Cherry, I'll go straight to Church Path and give her a regular good setting-down."

"No, my dear uncle, you must not do that. She has been hard, just because it is not in her nature to be soft. And it is not wonderful if she wants me to go. She says truly that there has been trouble and disturbance ever since I came from school."

Cherry wiped away a few tears, and Mr. Goodall felt an uncomfortable sensation in his throat. She went on, speaking low, but with concentrated feeling.

"I can never repay my debt of gratitude to you, uncle. If it had not been for your kindness I should never have known Miss Noel, nor my dear dead friend. But you will naturally think that all the money spent on me is wasted. Will you let me pay it back again, little by little ——"

"Hush! hush!" He held up his hand. "Do you think I can't spare a few pounds to my own sister's child? Why, Cherry, I did well in business, wonderful well, my dear. Those 'Ampshire 'ams,—but whatever am I mentioning them for? It's strange that forbidden words

is always rising to the lips; but the memory of old days is sweet to a tradesman, however fine his wife and daughter may be!"

Cherry's tears were dried, and she lifted up her face to kiss him in silent gratitude. It might be a sad world, she thought, but there were a great many kind people in it.

Uncle Barnaby returned the kiss, and went his way. But he was met in the hall by Mr. Mornay, who led him into another room, and talked to him about Cherry.

It was chiefly on Cherry's account that the Mornays decided to extend their holiday for another week. Had any one ever known such an autumn? There were even now, few tokens of the departure of summer, and the air of Little Creek was far clearer and purer than that of Alderport. The garden, leading down to the shore, had once been part of the extensive grounds that surrounded an old mansion. The mansion had been pulled down years ago, but some of the shrubs and trees had survived the house, and grew and flourished luxuriantly in the old soil. A clipped yew hedge sheltered the garden from the sea-wind, and just outside the hedge and the low stone wall, there was a wooden bench which was Mr. Mornay's favourite seat.

It was here that he brought Cherry, one day when the time of their departure was very near.

The view that opened out before them was so lovely that neither felt anxious to break the silence. It was perhaps peace rather than silence which reigned in this retired spot, for the sea was never voiceless. Always, in summer and winter there was the wash of waves on the strand, and to-day the sound was as soft as a lullaby. The sun, now high, had dispersed the mists of the earlier morning, but in the curves of the shore there were thin veils of vapour lingering still. The sea lay blue and tranquil in the calm sunlight; white sails gleamed here and there; now and again a gull beat the quiet air with silvery wings. It was Cherry who spoke first, timidly and slowly.

"I have been thinking a great deal while I have been getting well," she said. "This is the first illness that I have ever had, and it has kept me still and made me thoughtful. Something tells me that it will be a good thing to enter a sisterhood, and give my services to the poor. I must devote myself entirely to others, the voice says; that is the only way in which I can ever hope to be happy."

Mr. Mornay turned and glanced at the beautiful face by his side, and there was a slight smile hovering round his mouth as he answered.

"My child, a young girl hears many voices; but it is not always easy to tell which is the voice of heaven.

Wait until all your vigour comes back;—wait until you find life interesting again before you decide."

"I shall never find any interests in my own life; I must look for them in the lives of others." She spoke in a tone of such calm conviction that the smile settled on her companion's lips. Then, as she turned towards him, he grew instantly grave.

"I know all that you are feeling now," he said. "But the heart of the girl does not know what the heart of the woman will be. And sometimes, if she is not watched and warned, the girl may bind herself with fetters that the woman must break, or die. There are souls who go through life pinioned by the strong bonds of an early vow. Again I say wait a while, and have patience."

"I did not think you would tell me to wait." There was a tinge of shyness and disappointment in her manner. "Miss Mornay said you were born to be a director, and you have so many difficulties brought to you. But this plan did not appear to be a difficulty; it came to me as a divine dictate. Is not hesitation almost disobedience?"

"No," he answered. "Remember I do not tell you to give up your idea entirely. I only say do not bind yourself yet by any vow. See first whether you cannot live the higher life in the world; the unselfish life of a loving helpful woman;—a woman free to be a wife and mother.

You did not expect this counsel from me? Well, you may thank me, later on, for having given it."

"I will follow your counsel," she said meekly. "I see that you think I am not fitted to be a *religeuse*. But indeed I have lost all the hopes and ambitions common to girlhood. I cannot even feel my old simple pleasure in pretty things; that has left me, like everything else."

The grey eyes, grave and sweet, looked wistfully across the water as if they would discover that Silent Land to which her joys had fled. But Mr. Mornay could see farther than she did.

A single man, with "a heart at leisure from itself," he had made a study of young men and women and could predict their futures with tolerable accuracy. Moreover, with his genuine goodness was combined a strong love of power, and a wonderful aptitude for directing others. And he was a safe director, seeing with unerring eyes all the weaknesses and all the strong points, and pointing out a path where the strength could be used, and the weakness not too severely tried.

"Wait," he said kindly, "until you return to London, and then the old pleasure will steal back unawares. I have known many girls ready to renounce the world after an illness; but, as I have said, one must be quite sure that the voice comes from the right quarter before it is obeyed."

Cherry was, as he divined, a trifle disappointed. He could not know, she thought, how completely every avenue of hope had been closed by Cissy's death. But what he did not surely know, he suspected. He could understand that her grief for her lost friend had prostrated her in body and mind; but he believed that combined with this sorrow there was another, of a kind which could not be so easily confessed. What was this sorrow but a misplaced or unfortunate affection? He was interested in the girl who had drifted into his life, and he knew that the time would come when he should learn all the secrets of her heart.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN LONDON AGAIN.

A FEW days after the talk by the sea, the Mornays left Little Creek, and Cherry accompanied them to London.

Miss Noel received her with the tenderest of welcomes, but when she found herself again within the familiar walls of Cedar House her strength was severely tried. Everything here spoke so eloquently of Cissy. Every moment she looked up, expecting to see the slender figure gliding into the room, and the sweet face smiling a sunny greeting. It seemed as if she had never truly realized her loss till now,—never fully known how devotedly she had loved her dead friend. And at first Miss Noel began to doubt whether she had done well in bringing her back to the old house. It might have been wiser to have waited till her health was more completely established, and the keen edge of her sorrow blunted by time.

But Sunday came, and she went to church, and sat

among the girls in her old place. The senior curate preached—a little man who wore spectacles—and Cherry remembered how she and Cissy, in their youthful cleverness, had sometimes laughed at his sermons. But she did not want to laugh to-day, and wondered how it was that she had never thought him a good preacher before? He did not give a better sermon than usual, but the plain words found an echo in her heart. One of the best uses of grief is that it teaches the charm of truths that are old and oft-repeated; they come to us with the freshness of a new and lovely song.

"Mr. Brand was as commonplace as ever;" said one of Miss Noel's cleverest girls as they walked home. And Cherry seemed to hear her old self speaking, and felt that the wisdom which sorrow imparts, is deeper than any that is learnt in our colleges. It is precisely "the commonplace" that we need in the time of our tribulation; the old-fashioned faith; the simple, childlike trust.

After that Sunday morning service she grew better and calmer. She was able even to go up to the room which she had shared with Cissy, where they had planned their wild scheme, and said their last goodbye. And when she came out of it she was conscious of a curious sense of peace, and a feeling that Cissy was not so very far off, after all. "I shall go to her," she thought; "and if I am

sure of going, why need I fret so much because she cannot return to me?"

On the following day she declared herself quite well enough to start off to South Molton Street, and begin dressmaking. Miss Noel pressed her to stay longer, and parted with her reluctantly; but Miss Grain openly applauded her determination to go. "Young people should never waste time," she said, "especially when they have to earn their own living in the world."

Once more with Effie Comyn in the dingy, busy house, she was ready to admit that Miss Grain, in her hard way, had spoken the truth. Once more among rich, heavy stuffs, ready to be made up into winter costumes, she was constrained to confess to herself that her old tastes were coming back. Effie Comyn wisely refrained from saying much about those chances and changes which had brought Cherry again to town. But she let the girl see that she found comfort and help in her, and entrusted her at once with a good many important duties.

But when Cherry unlocked the large trunk, which she had sent from the junction after leaving Heatherdown, she endured sharp pangs which were known only to herself. As she took out the delicate ball dress, the old passionate regret rolled over her like a great wave, and burning tears rose to her eyes. Truly she had paid a high price for those stolen delights of hers! The rustling of these soft

folds seemed to whisper "deceiver"; and all the other trifles,—the gloves, the Oriental fan, the lace-handkerchief, —how bitterly they reproached her with the false part that she had played! Memories of Cissy, too, had been locked up in this box; here were the jewels that her friend had given her; and all the various trinkets that she had thought too elegant to take to Alderport. She almost hated the sight of the large black trunk, and felt as if she had opened a tomb.

It was well for her, just then, that she was obliged to occupy her mind with other things. The weather, balmy and bright so long, was beginning to show a shrewish temper at last; two or three dismal days, with cold winds and grey skies, set all the women longing for velvet and plush and thick woollen gowns, and there was a general rush to the dressmakers. Miss Comyn's partner had left her in unlooked-for haste; and Cherry threw herself into the gap with an energy which Effie had hardly dared to hope for. Her spirit rose as the work increased, and she proved herself fully equal to the occasion.

It was a true rest when the young women put the costumes out of their heads, and enjoyed the calm of Sunday. "All through the week," said Effie, "we have been answering the vexed question—'Wherewithal shall we be clothed?' And it is good to have one day which we may spend without taking thought for raiment. We have

a bad name for frivolity and folly—we dressmakers,—but there are some of us who love to spend our rest-day in peace."

And after her first week of real hard London work, Cherry was disposed to make allowances for a good deal of merry-making on the part of her sisters of the needle. "Stitch, stitch, stitch!" is a weary accompaniment for one's life-song. Many a girl sustains herself through six days of toil with the thought of the seventh day's freedom. And then there is the trip to Richmond, or to Kew, and the late dinner at a restaurant; and afterwards,—well, afterwards, if a blighted life, if misery, if despair chance to follow their holiday, it is well if they find some kind hand to lead them out of the dark valley into a safe way of quietness and rest.

But Cherry, although she worked at the trade, knew little about the ways and habits of her fellow workers. She only felt that women who had nothing to do were often cruelly hard on women who had to toil for bread. She knew that ladies of Rosanne Archdale's stamp would have made no excuses for a dressmaker's craving after enjoyment, and would have been coldly disgusted at the rollicking outburst of spirits long pent up. But, for her own part, even endowed as she was with high principles and refined tastes, she was conscious of a deep sympathy with these bread-winners, and a great desire to make their way pleasant for their feet.

Mr. Mornay was a curate, and did not aspire to any

higher dignity. In his very quiet way he was a busy man, and had influence in high quarters and low quarters; but he liked to work on in his own fashion, and he worked successfully. He had, as we already know, ample means, and lived with his sisters in the house that had been his grandfather's before him.

The house was in Queen Anne Street, and was still protected by old iron railings, furnished with the huge extinguishers which the link-boys had used in bygone days. It was a sombre red-brick house which never changed its aspect, and disdained to put on any modern airs; and when its heavy door opened you half expected to be met by a gentleman in knee-breeches, and a lady in patches and powder. But instead of these phantoms of the past, came Dora and Lucilla Mornay, substantial women of to-day, and their brother with his graceful courtesy and genuine kindliness. They welcomed Cherry on Sunday afternoon, and led her to a corner by the fireside.

The girl was delighted with the quaint, comfortable old room, and the Dutch tiles all round the fireplace. Here there was no pretence; you were not imposed upon at every turn by Chippendale chairs fresh from the manufacturer's, and ancient carved presses just finished and sent home. Everything was really old, and had been used by the old lady and gentleman whose portraits smiled benignly from the wall. The scent of *pot pourri*

that pervaded the room gave Cherry a pang; it reminded her of Heatherdown.

"You are still looking a good deal too pensive, my dear," said Dora. "And yet I own I have a liking for young people with pensive faces;—they always seem to me to be full of possibilities, and they are not as self-conscious as the perpetual smilers. Dear me; I never can forget a certain girl with a smirk, who used to irritate me dreadfully!"

"You were rather hard upon her, Dora," remarked the gentle Lucilla. "Some foolish old person had admired her dimples, and after that she never forgot them for an instant. Is there any school, I wonder, where they try to teach girls the blessed art of self-forgetfulness?"

"You could never teach an empty-headed girl to forget herself," said Dora, in her decided way. "And as to the girl with the dimples, Edward found her as trying as I did. There he is in the depths of his chair, groaning at the recollection! He said he was so tired of her face that he should have liked to turn her to the wall like an objectionable portrait."

"Dora, I never said anything as strong as that." Mr. Mornay did not scruple to contradict his positive sister. "But I agree with you in liking just a shade of gravity in a young face. I love that face best in which I find—

'Sweet records, promises as sweet.'

If a woman is too lavish of her smiles she lets you see

the whole of her store, and there are no promises. Now, what a prosy old twaddler I am when you set me going! No one is ever as eloquent about the beauty of women as an unmarried man!"

"Because he has always admired their charms from a safe distance," said Dora, laughing.

"Still, it is not always so, Dora. I am thinking of a man I knew years ago,—a man who had been married, and who had quarrelled, not only with his wife, but with every woman who came near him. And yet he was a most ardent admirer of beauties, and made it his boast that all the ladies of his race had been handsome. He used to take me through his long picture gallery at Heatherdown, and point triumphantly to the De Wilton dames with their beautiful features, and ask if the men of his house had not possessed good taste?"

"Oh, you are speaking of old Sir Giles de Wilton of Heatherdown! I have always wanted to see that place," said Dora. "Let us make up our minds to take a house in the village next summer, Edward. We can write to the clergyman, can we not? Perhaps he will let us have the vicarage. Now, Lucilla, what are you fussing about?"

"About Cherry," Lucilla answered, with an anxious tone in her soft voice. "She does not drink her tea, and she sits there getting paler and paler. I wonder what we had better do with the dear child?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THROUGH A SHOP WINDOW.

MR. MORNAY was one of the keenest men alive. He seldom let anything escape him, and he had been studying Cherry while he talked. He had seen that her cheeks had suddenly whitened when he had mentioned Heatherdown.

Now he had always believed that the girl had a secret; probably a foolish, innocent little secret enough. And he wanted to find out what it was, not because he was curious, but because he desired to make her happy. It is bad for the young, he argued, to have concealments; and he feared to-day that Cherry's secret was like "a worm i' the bud." But how could it possibly be, in any way, connected with Heatherdown? There had positively been a frightened look in her eyes when Dora had talked lightly of going there next summer.

But he had far too much tact to say any more about the De Wiltons and their home just then. He let his

sisters busy themselves with Cherry in their kind womanly way; and he asked if she had sat up too late at night to help Miss Comyn? The matter-of-fact kindness of his tone set the girl at ease; she did not think that he suspected anything. And she assured him that the work agreed with her very well, and called up a smile as she spoke.

But when she was back again in Effie Comyn's parlour, her heart began to ache sadly under the pressure of its burden. She looked at Effie, sitting in an arm-chair, with her peaceful face bent over a book, and she was seized with a sudden longing to tell everything to this faithful friend. The fire blazed merrily; the lamp shed a cheerful glow over the room; and Cherry lay on the sofa in the corner with her secret trembling on her lips. Suddenly she broke the silence by asking a question.

"Effie, did you ever know the fate of the letter which you sent to me at Heatherdown?"

"The letter?" Effie was absorbed in her book, and came out of it with an effort. "Oh, yes; it came back to me through the post office."

"Then it had been opened, of course. Can you remember what you said in it?"

"Yes," said Effie, after a pause. "You know that when you were leaving me you told me to open any letter that might come from Alderport. I understood that you did not want to be troubled with thoughts of Alderport while you were

enjoying your holiday, and when Mrs. Dent's letter arrived I did open it. It was not pleasantly written; and I sent you a few lines, telling you that you were wanted at home."

"Can you recollect those few lines, Effie?"

"I think I said—'My dear Cherry, Mrs. Dent wants you to come back and begin teaching at once. I wish I could have seen you in your pretty dresses, and I hope you have had a happy time.' I wrote on our business note-paper, and signed my full name."

"Ah," said Cherry, drawing a long breath; "it seems as if that holiday of mine were only a dream!"

"You have never told me anything about it," Effie remarked, laying down her book, and looking rather wonderingly at her companion. "Did you not like the people? Do you never hear from them?"

"I liked them; but I never hear from them. They have quite forgotten me, I daresay. And so many things have happened,—Cissy's sudden summons to India, and then her death. Oh, Effie, I cannot bear to think of Heatherdown now!"

"Then don't think of it, my dear," said Effie kindly. "You have had a great deal of sorrow, Cherry, and it is well to forget the past as much as you can. You are young, and you don't know what good things the future holds for you. God does not often make us happy in the way we have chosen for ourselves; He leads us into a new path, and gives us blessings that we have never even dreamed of."

"Effie!" Cherry spoke with her face hidden in her hands. "My whole life has been changed by Cissy's death. If she had lived, she would have done a great deal for me."

"She would have done what she could; but God can do still more," said the little Scotch woman firmly. "And all that she meant to do may yet be done, but by other hands, and in another manner. Have patience, Cherry, and have faith."

And Cherry listened and was comforted; but she could not tell her secret to Effie, because her courage failed.

She went to bed that night haunted by Effie's words. It was true that all that Cissy had meant to do, might yet be done; but by other hands. Whose hands? Ah! how could such a question be answered, till time itself should yield a reply?

In every life there are hands working, seen and unseen; hands that mar and hands that bless; hands that bind us, and hands that set us free; hands that drag us downward, and hands that lead us upward to the everlasting hills. Material influences and spiritual influences are always busy around us, always mingling with all that we think or say or do. In some way or other, therefore, Cherry's secret would certainly be revealed at last, even if her own lips remained sealed.

Monday morning dawned misty and grey; and Effie Comyn was her usual busy self again, despatching her

breakfast with all speed, and thinking about the plush that was to be combined with Mrs. Somerville's broché silk.

"I can't trust any of the girls in such an important matter," she said. "You must go and get the plush, Cherry; your judgment is as good as mine, or better. What a help you are to me! Now I do hope there will not be a fog; you want a clear light to-day."

"The sun is coming out." Cherry shook off the thoughts that were still clinging to her, and gave her whole attention to business. "I think we shall please Mrs. Somerville, although she is not easily satisfied. What a queen of whims she is!"

"Well, she can afford to pay for her whims," said Effie, rising from the table. "Yes; there is going to be some sunshine; make haste, my dear, while it lasts."

And Cherry did make haste, swiftly wrapping herself in the large fur-lined cloak which had protected her from the night damps on the sea. She did not give many thoughts to her dress that morning; but when she put on a black velvet toque, which had seen much service, it suddenly occurred to her that her face was still young. Her bright hair waved in sunny ripples under the old toque; the soft oval of her cheek was as perfect as ever. Only a month or two had gone by since her beauty had been praised at Heatherdown; and in spite of sorrow and illness she was beautiful still.

When she went out of doors there was more sunshine than she had ventured to hope for; the morning had promised little and given much. Town was getting full again, making ready for those winter gaieties which are less splendid, but more convivial than the assemblies of the season. With light feet, Cherry picked her way across the mud of Oxford Street, and turned her steps first of all to the post-office. Her business there was to receive payment for a money order, sent by one of Miss Comyn's country customers, and this done the shopping came next.

But when she came out of the post-office in Vere Street, she did not immediately hurry off to the draper's. Just a few doors from the post-office there is a flower shop, and Cherry had the true feminine love of flowers. It is a shop which few can pass without lingering and longing; for there, no matter what time of year it may be, are bunches and coronals of roses; sprays of delicate blossoms set in maidenhair; graceful baskets filled with a profusion of floral treasures. Those superb cream-coloured roses! Cherry did not know how to tear herself away from them; and there was a great bouquet of violets, loosely tied with purple ribbon, which she stood and sighed for with all her heart.

Suddenly, between the roses and violets, there appeared a face, looking steadily through the shop-window at her. When she first became conscious of that fixed

gaze, she shivered from head to foot, and felt, for a second, as if she had not strength to move from the spot.

And then came the sudden impulse to turn and fly; and the limbs, which had been paralyzed for a moment, gained new vigour from the passionate desire to escape. She crossed Vere Street in hot haste, never heeding cabs and carriages, and made straight for the principal entrance to Marshall & Snelgrove's shop. An idea had flashed suddenly into her troubled brain; if she were followed (and there was little doubt that *he* would follow her), she must take refuge within the mazes of this large establishment, and trust to her woman's wit to evade pursuit.

She sped along Oxford Street, and turned in at the shop-door, heedlessly jostling an indignant matron, portly and pompous, who was coming out to her carriage. At any other time Cherry would have been shocked at her own unintentional rudeness, but now she had neither thoughts nor apologies for the aggrieved dame. She went on through the long shop aisles, never casting even a glance at the things piled up on the counters, answering at random the polite inquiries addressed to her. She wondered, long afterwards, that she was not detained; but there was nothing in her look and manner to attract notice; she seemed hurried, and that was all. At length, stepping out through the door that opens into the quietest part of Henrietta Street, she felt herself comparatively safe, and breathed freely.

But she dared not rest in this locality. Through street after street she wandered, forgetting her errand; her heart aching with intolerable pain; her eyes seeing nothing but Arnold de Wilton's keen hazel eyes, looking eagerly into hers. Was her life to be always for the future a game of hide and seek? Must she be condemned to appear before him, like one risen from the dead, in unexpected places, and at unexpected times? London was not large enough to hold them both; it would be impossible to escape him if he was always on the watch for her face. And something told her that he would be on the watch; he was not a trifler, but a strong-willed, determined man, and if there was a mystery to be solved he would solve it.

At last, remembering Effie Comyn's business, she made her way by a circuitous route to Oxford Circus, and forced herself to give attention to the matter in hand. At last carrying her parcel, and worn out with excitement and weariness, she reached South Molton Street once more; and admitted herself with her latch-key.

"What a long time you have been gone!" said Effie, when she entered the work-room. "And have you been successful? Why, child, has anything happened? You are as white as death! I am sure you have had a fright."

"Yes; I have had a fright," answered Cherry, putting down the parcel and tottering away to her own room.

CHAPTER XXX.

"THE BURDEN OF UNQUIET LIFE."

THE rest of that day passed by like other days. Cherry had made her purchases satisfactorily; and Effie, seeing that she seemed to have recovered her spirits, did not question her about the fright. She said to herself that the child was weak from recent illness, and that the common accidents and hairbreadth escapes seen every hour in London streets were too much for her nerves. She was very tender with Cherry, coaxing her to eat and providing her with a comfortable chair near the fire; and before night set in the girl was soothed, and tried to persuade herself that she might never have such a shock again.

Nevertheless, she was always expecting shocks. When Effie, with the best intentions, sent her out shopping that she might take the air, Cherry was always looking about for another glimpse of that face. She did not venture near Marshall & Snelgrove's again; and she dared not

pass the flower shop in Vere Street. But there was business to be done here and there in Oxford Street and Regent Street, and she was perpetually afraid of being seen, and pursued, and captured. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday came and went; she saw nothing more, heard nothing more, and toiled on quietly in her daily round.

They were treading the same earth, Arnold and herself, and there was always a chance of a meeting. More than anything else in life she dreaded these meetings; and yet, poor child, she loved him so well that she would have gladly encountered danger just to watch his face and be herself unseen.

On Sunday she had her wish; but it did not bring her any comfort after all.

The bells were ringing for service, and the day was dreamy and sweet with November sunshine. She turned her back upon the main thoroughfares and walked slowly along the quiet streets—deserted now by most of the fashionable inhabitants—to Mayfair. She could not have told why she chose to walk in this direction; she was not even sure of her route until she gained Berkeley Square, and saw golden leaves drifting softly about in the melancholy sunlight. And then she strolled on, still aimlessly, till she reached the door of Berkeley chapel, and found that the service had already begun.

The little chapel, full enough in the season, had a good

many empty seats at this time of the year, and one of the widows who act as pew-openers found Cherry a place at once. The seat was in a side-aisle under the gallery, and near the entrance. She slipped quietly in, just as the clergyman had come to the end of the exhortation.

Cherry was alone in her pew, and sat at the door. In front of her there were only two persons, and then came a pew with five. They were in the middle of the *Venite* before she gave any special notice to her fellow-worshippers; but at length her glance happened to rest on a lady standing at the top of the pew which had five persons in it.

Her first look told her that this woman was beautiful, her second that there was something familiar about her. Surely she had seen that haughty well-cut profile before; and the little black bonnet, adorned with a cluster of deep crimson leaves, was worn with a proud air that she remembered well. It was Lady Rosanne Archdale who was standing there, restless as usual, and turning now and then to glance at the man by her side.

From Rosanne, Cherry's eyes wandered to her companion, and she felt herself trembling from head to foot. There was the dark-brown head, closely cropped, there were the broad shoulders, and, as he turned a little, she could catch a side view of the strong manly face that was printed so deeply on her memory. Yes, there they were, side by side, Arnold de Wilton and his old sweet-

heart, Lady Rosanne. She had wished to be very near him when he was unconscious of her presence, and she had won her wish indeed.

It made her as wretched as if it had been one of the wishes granted in fairy times. She knew that Arnold believed her dead; but how quickly and easily he had gone back to Rosanne. And yet, was it not natural that he should turn again to the brilliant woman who liked him, although she had veiled her liking under her imperious ways? Did he look as if his lot was a hard one? Ah, she thought that it was easy enough to tell how it had all come to pass! He had been grieved at first, deeply grieved, perhaps, at the death of his girl love. And then Rosanne had drawn near him with ready words of sympathy, saying just the right thing, never over-acting her part, and impressing him with a belief in her sincerity. His sorrow had made him easier to win; it had given her, too, an opportunity to show herself in a new character—that of the gentle, sympathizing, womanly friend.

It was jealousy that was torturing Cherry now; fiery, angry jealousy burning in her heart and consuming her. She knew that she ought to have been glad that he was consoled; she knew that she had stolen into society to which she did not belong, and won his love unfairly; but all this knowledge did not make her pain any easier to bear. She recalled an old story of a poor girl who

had prayed to be released from purgatory for one hour that she might go back to earth and comfort her mourning lover. The prayer was heard, and she revisited the scenes of her former joy, only to find the lover with a new love by his side. Was that maiden's experience very unlike her own?

The service went on, and Cherry stood up and sat down like other people; but she hardly realized where she was at all. Arnold never once looked behind him. If he had chanced to turn his head over his left shoulder he would have seen her sitting in her seat by the pew door. By-and-bye there was the sermon, and Rosanne fidgeted and whispered to him once or twice; and then at last came the benediction. Alas! there was no blessing for one passionate soul that morning.

No sooner were the closing words spoken than Cherry stole out swiftly and noiselessly, and walked back as fast as she could into Berkeley Square. Here she paused for a few seconds to get her breath and collect her thoughts. Her heart was still throbbing wildly; the jealous pain was still burning as hotly as ever. The Square was very quiet just then; very few people were about, and she took hold of the iron railings, and looked through them with despairing eyes at the half-stripped trees and damp grass.

She was standing thus, quite motionless, absorbed in her misery, when she felt a gentle pull at her dress, and looking down she saw a child of four staring at her with

astonished eyes. "What's a matter?" asked this inquisitive little person. She wore a fantastic bonnet, big enough for her grandmother, and out of it looked those sunny brown eyes. The face was rosy and dimpled; an audacious little face that would get all that it asked for, later on, by reason of its sweet daring. Cherry could not resist it for a moment. She stooped down and lifted the small quaint figure in her arms and kissed her, with many a thought of little Walter far away.

The child did not object to being kissed, nor did her father and mother object in the least. They came into sight in the next minute, a young clerk and his wife in their Sunday clothes; and when Cherry set the little girl on her feet again the proud mother gave her a smile. Cherry envied the young woman as she walked away, holding her tiny daughter by the hand; but it was not envy of a bitter kind. For all the bitterness had been taken out of her heart by the child's kiss.

It has been often said that those were happy times when men lifted up their eyes and beheld angels, who came to the door of their tent and spoke to them as friend speaks to friend. But Cherry always thought that at every crisis of her life an angel came to her in the form of a little child. In these days, she believed, it was God's way to send messages by children,—very little children, whose language is only intelligible to the ears of those who love them.

She walked on homeward feeling soothed and stilled, although her soul was exceeding sorrowful still. But when she came indoors her eyes told that she had been crying, and Effie Comyn looked at her anxiously.

Now, Effie was not the woman to force any one's confidence; but she felt, to some extent, responsible for this girl's welfare, and she saw that Cherry was hiding a trouble. She was quick-sighted, and she believed that in some way or other the trouble was connected with Heatherdown. Cherry had been remarkably silent concerning her visit to the De Wiltons; she had not chattered about her doings as most girls would have done, and her reserve had seemed strange to Miss Comyn. And yet, it was quite likely, she thought, that Cherry was secretly hankering after the life of which she had had but a brief glimpse.

"My dear," she said, kissing the beautiful pale cheek; "I do not like to see you so sad. Girls ought to be happy when they have work to do which they don't dislike, and when they have friends who love them. You really like dressmaking, and you have friends. Ought you not to be thankful?"

"I am thankful," answered Cherry. She hardly looked it with those melancholy eyes. "Thankful—yes; nothing would be too bad for me if I was not."

"Then, my dear, why don't you wear a brighter face?

This morning, after service, I went to see a poor girl who used to work for me. She has had a long illness, and the expenses have swallowed up all her little savings. She lives with her sister, a widow with children ; and they are all poor, very poor. The girl needs wine and nourishing food, and all sorts of impossible things ; but one does not know how she is to get them all. And she won't be really fit for work yet for a long time ; an illness of that kind leaves one a worn-out creature. Yet, Cherry, I don't think her face looked sadder than yours does to-day."

The grey eyes filled with tears. Miss Comyn softly patted the hand she was holding, and went on.

"Cherry, do you not sometimes think a little about the lives of the Unemployed? You don't see the worst of those lives ; the unwashed men who stand about at street corners are not half as much to be pitied as the decent-looking women who pass you every day. Women who have knocked at all the work doors, and found them closed ; women who have almost forgotten what a good meal is like ; women who would rather face death itself than this bitter winter weather which will come upon us soon. Take the life of one of these women, and put it beside your own, and then ask yourself what you have done to make God so kind to you? Oh, my dear, my dear, from her to whom much is given, shall not much be required?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"BUT IT APPEARS SHE LIVES."

ALL young people who are in love are apt to jump to conclusions. And if the conclusion is a dismal one, so much the more readily do they jump. Cherry, with one wild bound, had leaped to the conviction that Arnold de Wilton was engaged to Lady Rosanne Archdale—merely because she had seen them sitting side by side in church.

But Effie's sensible words took good effect, and she turned to her work cheerfully and thankfully, trying to think more about the world and less about herself. Then, when there was a little pause in the rush of business, she went one day to see the sick girl of whom Miss Comyn had spoken.

Now Rosa Bond was an interesting girl, with a natural refinement of look and manner. She was pretty, too, with that delicate, sallow prettiness so often seen in London girls of her class. She had great wistful eyes, which told

you her whole story before she uttered a word—eyes with large pupils and thick lashes. And when she and Cherry had talked with each other for a little while there sprang up a sweet sympathy between them. Cherry fancied that she could trace a shadowy likeness to Cissy Dysart in poor Rosa, and loved to do her utmost for the invalid.

Days went and came; foggy days and fair days; there was plenty of work to do, and never had Cherry worked more willingly. Rosa was supplied with a basket of good things, and the Mornays had promised to go to see her. The week sped away, and Cherry really believed that she had grown reconciled to her lot, when Saturday morning dawned again.

"Cherry," said Effie Comyn, after breakfast, "here is a note from Miss Harrowby requesting me to send her dress home to-night. It is too bad of her to hurry us. It's the crimson silk, you know, and we want some more velvet. Where did you get the velvet, Cherry?"

"At Swan & Edgar's," Cherry replied.

"Very well; then you must set off to Swan & Edgar's presently and get some more. I hope it is not all gone; you see it's not a common colour."

So Cherry set off to Regent Street cheerfully enough; and, for November, it was a fair morning. There had been just enough rain in the night to make the streets slippery, and one or two omnibus horses went down. The sun was struggling brightly through the mist when she entered

Swan & Edgar's, and her business was done in a few minutes. The velvet was not all gone; she carried away another yard of it in triumph.

When she came out of the shop, happy in having so easily accomplished her task, there were two men standing and talking outside the window. One of these men looked at her and gave a great start. Her eyes met his; she saw that he was coming towards her—eager, excited, pale—and, quick as thought, she signed to the driver of a hansom, slowly crawling by, and jumped in. The movement was so rapid that the man was baulked. But we already know that Arnold de Wilton was not one of those who tamely submit to defeat.

He, too, called a hansom, and told the driver to follow the other cab, and drive like anything. The man obeyed, and began by whipping up his horse. And the poor brute, after making one bound forward, suddenly slipped down, and rolled over hopelessly on its side; and Arnold de Wilton found himself, he hardly knew how, standing on the pavement again.

"Well, you did make a mess of it, old man!" said his friend, who was an old schoolfellow. "That was a most amusing performance, witnessed from this spot. Who was the lady?"

"That's just what I want to find out," replied Arnold, rather sulkily.

"She's got the best of it this time," the other said, laughing outright. A good deal is written about the delight of women in each other's little failures; but for genuine, hearty enjoyment of his brother's mishaps, there is no one like a man. De Wilton's friend derived the most exquisite satisfaction from his discomfiture, and laughed over it for the rest of the day. It seasoned his luncheon at the club, and sweetened the cup of afternoon tea, poured out for him by a pretty girl in Kensington; and he chuckled over it the last thing at night.

As for Arnold, he walked quietly back to his own rooms in Sackville Street; and then the first thing he did was to go to his desk, unlock it, and take out a photograph.

It was that cabinet portrait of Cherry which Cissy Dysart had so audaciously sent to Lady de Wilton instead of her own. A perfect likeness it was; and the young man studied it long and thoughtfully. There was the oval face, the delicate, proud features, and the deep grey eyes that he remembered so well. And he had seen that face again a few minutes ago; surely he knew it far too intimately to be mistaken; how softly the bright hair had rippled over the forehead; how clear and fresh she had looked in the morning sunshine!

And yet, had weeks or months gone by since that day when the news of her death came to Heatherdown? He lived over the morning again, and recalled every little

detail. The *Times* on the breakfast table; Lady Rosanne with a cluster of scarlet geraniums in her bodice; his aunt's gentle questions about his plans for the afternoon. And then those cruel lines in the first column of the paper—words which had suddenly made him shiver and turn cold, and had sorely tested his manliness. How they had all looked at his face; Lady de Wilton with a frightened glance, Rosanne with her great brilliant eyes ablaze with curiosity! Sir Henry had taken the paper out of his hand, scanned it quickly, and spared his nephew the pain of making the announcement.

And from that day he had been a changed man; not outwardly, because great changes are nearly always wrought invisibly. Before the news came his life had been warm with the hidden light of a bright hope and a true love. He had meant to win the girl—meant to cross the sea and claim her for his very own, no matter who dared to stand between them. She was, in very truth, his first true love; not his first fancy, for he had had the usual number of fancies; but the first woman whom he had steadfastly desired for a wife. And in a moment the hope had been snatched away; and he knew that no future would give him a bride so sweet as that Cissy Dysart who had been so nearly won.

Those who knew him best had been too wise to weary him with words of sympathy. Sir Henry had advised

him to try sea-air,—"just by way of a freshener, you know, my boy,"—and he had gone on a yachting trip along the coast with one of his oldest friends. But there was no need for any one to be anxious about the health of a man who had never been ill in his life, and was not ill now. And then he came up to town, and wrote to Sir Henry, saying that he was heartily sick of inaction. He had offered his services to an Emigration Society, and intended to go out with some of the emigrants himself, and help them to settle in a new country.

Sir Henry was a good deal worried by this letter, and Lady de Wilton shed many tears. Rosanne, who was staying with her grandmother in Mayfair, wrote words of comfort to Heatherdown. The mood would pass away, she said confidently; it was not in the nature of any man to be constant to a memory; and, after all, how little he had really known of Miss Dysart! He had been once or twice to see her in Curzon Street, and she had confidence in her own powers of consolation. But this confidence was not shared by Sir Henry and his wife. "Rosanne does not understand him," they said to each other; "and she never will."

This was true. And although Arnold had gone so far as to think her somewhat softened and improved, she was no nearer to him in spirit than she had ever been.

Then came that sudden glimpse of Cherry, as she stood

looking in at the flower-shop window; and Arnold, scarcely believing the evidence of his senses, had rushed out of the shop and followed her. For more than an hour he had lingered in Oxford Street, in front of Marshall & Snelgrove's, waiting for her to come out. But she did not come; and he had tried to persuade himself that he had imagined the strong resemblance to his lost love.

At the second meeting there could be no mistake. There, in the bloom of youth and health, was Cissy Dysart, just as he had seen her last; and yet Cissy was sleeping in her ocean grave.

He began to have grave doubts about the state of his own brain. Was this girl, who seemed so real to him, a veritable being of flesh and blood, or was she merely the creature of his fancy, born of his passionate regret? He had read of those who had dwelt and pondered on an idea until it appeared to their excited minds to take shape and form. Yet, in spite of this perpetual heart-ache, he was clear-headed and strong; and the girl he had seen to-day was surely no phantom. His companion had seen her too; and had watched her spring into the cab and drive away.

There was one fact that could never be disputed for a moment,—the fact of Cissy Dysart's death. Mrs. Hope had written a full account to Lady de Wilton, and Arnold knew that she had passed away in quietness and peace.

To the De Wiltons the shock was all the greater because their young guest had left them in perfect health. But Sir Henry, with much self-reproach, remembered that he had let her depart in sorrow. Yet how could he have acted otherwise? He had no power to detain her;—no right to urge her to disobey Sir Reginald's commands. To him, however, and to his wife, came moments of strong regret, when they almost wished that they had defied her father's authority, and kept the girl at Heatherdown.

Arnold, as he sat gazing at the photograph, was beginning to feel that here was a mystery which must be cleared up at any cost. Cissy Dysart was dead, true; but he had seen not Cissy's ghost, but Cissy herself. And she had seen him and known him too. He recalled the startled look in her face, the wild desire to escape. Was it, after all, some stranger who had died in her stead, and been committed to the deep? Or had the sea given up its dead before the appointed time?

He sat thinking these thoughts until his brain began to feel confused; and he felt that he must fly from himself and his musings, and seek fresh air, and the company of his fellow men. Should he tell any one of this strange return of the dead to life? Should he take some friend into his confidence, so that they might investigate the matter together? It would be well to do this; but where could he find the friend?

CHAPTER XXXII.

"WILL YOU BE RULED BY ME?"

CHERRY had got out of the hansom at the corner of South Molton Street, and had hastily paid the driver, and hurried home. She did not feel safe until she had shut the house-door, nor did she venture upstairs into the work-room till her nerves were quieted in some degree. What a dreadful life was this that she had to live! She had escaped him twice, but it was impossible to elude him always. He would be on the watch for her now; a man's strength and resolution would be more than a match for all her poor little feeble strategems and precautions. He would follow her and find her, and force her to make a full confession of the trick she had played.

Effie Comyn noticed her agitation, and refrained from saying anything about it. But when Sunday afternoon came, she reminded Cherry that it was time to go to see the Mornays, and added that they were good people,

thoroughly to be relied upon. She did not openly say that she saw that Cherry was guarding a secret; she only remarked that Mr. Mornay and his sisters must have had great experience in directing others.

Cherry understood the hint conveyed in her words, and as she was putting on her bonnet, she almost made up her mind to tell Mr. Mornay everything. But when she reached Queen Anne Street, and stopped before the old house with the quaint iron railings, her mind was unmade again. She went in with a certain shy distress in her face which her friends observed at once. They began, of course, to make much of her in their quiet fashion, and did not let her suspect that she was studied; but they watched her attentively. Mr. Mornay's deepset eyes took note of every shade that flitted over her face as he sat, half hidden, in the depths of his chair.

"Play something, Lucilla," he said; and his younger sister went obediently to the piano, and played a sonata of Beethoven's; and the music found its way to Cherry's soul. Lucilla played beautifully,—clearly, softly,—interpreting the mind of the composer. No one, with ears to hear, ever failed to understand the meaning of all that she played.

The piano stood in a little room which was divided by curtains from the drawing-room. While Lucilla was still playing, Dora went noiselessly away; the player, half-

screened by the looped-up curtains, made her music softer and softer; and Cherry sat listening in the firelight and twilight. She almost started when she found that Mr. Mornay had left his chair, and was sitting by her side.

"Child," he said, in his quiet voice, "can you not trust me?"

"Yes." The girl began to tremble a little as she caught his steady gaze, fixed on her in the firelight. "Yes; every one must trust you."

"And yet you tell me nothing," he went on. "You are concealing something, and suffering very much. I beg you, for your own sake, to speak. It will be much better for you, and ever so much safer."

Her eyes were full of dumb distress. Lucilla was still playing softly, and her music seemed to persuade and entreat. She spoke at last in a low, uncertain tone.

"I will tell you, Mr. Mornay, what really troubles me. I will open my heart to you, and follow your counsel, however hard it may be to do it. A girl needs a director;—there are too many guideless girls about in the world, are there not? I have done something wrong, very wrong; when you hear what it is, you will perhaps despise me?"

"I am sure that I never shall despise you."

"It all began on a Sunday evening at school, when Cissy Dysart and I were alone together. You know already how dearly we loved each other; she had been so

498

CHERRY'S SECRET REVEALED TO MR MORNAY.

kind to me that I could refuse her nothing;—I can never make any one understand how generous and loving she was. That evening she proposed that we should carry out a wild scheme which had entered her mind. We were alike, very much alike, only that I was healthy and strong, and she was always delicate. And she arranged that I should go to spend the midsummer holidays with some people who had known her mother, and had invited her to their house. I was to go, not as Cherry Dent, but as Miss Dysart."

"Then these people had never seen Miss Dysart?"

"Never; and they wanted to see her and know her before she returned to India. She was not well enough to go to them; but instead of declining the invitation she accepted it, and sent them my portrait as if it had been her own."

"They are people in a high position, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; that is the worst of it. Cissy wanted me to have a glimpse of the life that they lead,—to study their manners and their dresses,—and I wished it also. It was very foolish and wrong, and just at the last I prayed Cissy to let me give it all up. But she would not. Then, when I arrived at the—the great house, I found every one so kind and pleasant that I began to enjoy myself. I was mean enough to forget that I was an impostor."

She paused to wipe away a few tears. Mr. Mornay

broke the brief silence, speaking in a gentle fatherly tone that comforted her greatly.

"It was a schoolgirl's folly. But you, poor child, you have something more to tell me, and you don't know how to tell it. Someone fell in love with you, did he not?"

"Oh, how did you know my story?" A burning blush spread itself over her face, and faded as quickly as it came.

"I did not know your story, my child. But, I know the stories of other young women, and there is a strong likeness among Mother Eve's daughters. I often find one girl's history repeated in another. Go on, Cherry."

"He did fall in love with me, I believe, Mr. Mornay; and he is someone nearly related to the head of the house. The last time that we were together he spoke to me in a way that I could not mistake. He was going out of the house for a few days, and he expected to find me there on his return, for the term of my visit had not expired. But next morning came a letter from Cissy, saying that she was suddenly summoned to India, and I must leave that very day. Sir Reginald Dysart had sent orders for her to come out with some friends of his—the Hopes; and the Hopes were acquainted with the people with whom I was staying. So I left in haste."

"Then the game grew dangerous just at the end?"

"Yes; but I knew that Cissy would write to my

hostess before the ship sailed. She would write, you see, as if *she* had been staying at that house instead of myself. And then a strange thing happened which puzzled Miss Noel very much. On the day of Cissy's departure, a young man came hurriedly to Cedar House, and asked if Miss Dysart were really gone?"

She paused again, and her voice shook as if it would break into sobs. Mr. Mornay was leaning forward in his chair, watching her with the keenest attention.

"You know how wearily the days passed for me at Alderport, while I was waiting for a letter from Cissy. She had promised me that if any trouble came out of my visit to—those people—she would confess everything and take all the blame on herself. And I wanted everything confessed; indeed I did. I knew that they would despise me, and be angry with me for the cheat; but it would be only right for *him* to be undeceived. He might even follow Cissy to India if he did not know."

"That was quite likely," said Mr. Mornay, calmly.

"And then came Miss Noel's letter, telling me of Cissy's death. There is no need for me to go over that part of my story again. But you see now why I wanted to enter a sisterhood? And perhaps you will see, too, that it would have been my best course, after all?"

"I do not see it, Cherry," he answered, with the utmost composure.

"But you will see it before I have done." She was clasping and unclasping her hands in a nervous way. "He has seen me twice since I came to London. The second time was yesterday, and he was coming towards me, but I escaped from him. Do you not know that I seem to him as one risen from the dead? I cannot forget that look on his face yesterday; it was a scared, bewildered look, and yet there was a kind of gladness in it. And we shall meet again,—I know we shall,—if I do not hide myself. I am afraid to go out of doors; I start at every sound. It would be best for me to go away from London, if I only knew where to go!"

"No, it would not be best for you to go out of London, my child. You have promised to follow my counsel, however hard it may be to do it. Well, I do not counsel concealment, but perfect openness. This man must be told everything. It is only just that the mystery should be cleared up without delay. Let me know his name, Cherry, and I will find him out and see him, and make your confession. You will be guided by me?"

Her face was absolutely colourless, and some seconds passed before she could speak.

"Oh," she said, "I will do as you think best. But do not urge me to tell you his name just now. I cannot,—I cannot! You do not know how weak I feel. I am like a reed shaken by the wind!"

She covered her face with her hands, and sat cowering and trembling over the fire, while Lucilla still went on playing her dreamy music. If Mr. Mornay was disappointed in the girl he did not show it. He had always known that there was a want of firmness in Cherry's character. She was swayed too easily by the force of her affections, and by the fears that grew out of those very affections.

If Mr. Mornay were to make her confession for her to Arnold de Wilton, she felt that Arnold would lose his dream. Instead of his dead love, always innocent and true, there would only be the image of a deceitful girl, who had played a mean trick to enter a circle into which she had no right to come. He had loved Cissy Dysart, beautiful, well-born, his own equal in every respect. And he would find that he had been cheated out of that love by one who had falsely borne her name. If Cissy herself had lived to take her full share of the blame and plead for her friend, there might have been some hope of pardon for Cherry. But surely there was no hope now. She knew that the confession must be made; she had promised to be guided by Mr. Mornay; and yet she put off the day, and cried out in her weakness—"Not yet—not yet!"

How she was punished for that weakness we shall see later on. Mr. Mornay said no more that evening.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"IS NOT THIS SOMETHING MORE THAN FANTASY?"

LADY ROSANNE ARCHDALE was a woman who made enemies. In one way or another she had offended nearly all her connections, and now her maternal grandmother was the only person left from whom she had any expectations. She did not like staying in Mrs. Courtney's dull house in Curzon Street; but just now it was more endurable than usual, because Arnold de Wilton was in town.

She was so deeply impressed with the importance of keeping on excellent terms with Mrs. Courtney that she made immense sacrifices, and exercised a prodigious amount of self-control. In her grandmother's good graces she had only one rival, a little orphan niece who had lately come to live in Curzon Street, and was a thorn in the side of Aunt Rosanne. For Miss Flora Paget, at twelve, was endowed with a truly terrible power of penetration, and was in the habit of speaking her mind plainly on

every subject. Granny, being an easy-tempered old person, did not check the child in the least. And Miss Flora made the most impertinent remarks with impunity.

It was Sunday evening, dull and foggy out of the house, and deadly lively indoors. There was yet an hour before dinner; Arnold de Wilton was coming to dine with them, and the thought of seeing him had been the only bright spot in Rosanne's dreary day. Was she growing softer-hearted as she grew older? Hardly that; yet she was conscious of finding life a greater bore than it used to be, and of thinking very often that Arnold, in spite of his numerous faults, would be a tolerably pleasant companion to end one's days with. She was not as restless now as she had been at Heatherdown, nor did she flash and glitter with the old brilliancy. She had even become capable of sitting still and musing in the firelight.

Things seemed, she thought, to be moving on in the right direction. Arnold came to Curzon Street about once a week, and there was no sparring now-a-days. Her new quietness of manner appeared to suit him very well; she was careful never to say anything that would jar on the gravity of his mood, and he appreciated her sympathy. Perhaps, too, he valued it all the more because he had not expected to find it. He had never thought of discovering honey in such a brilliant scentless flower, and yet here it was. The very colours of her dress were sub-

dued; and this evening, as she sat in a low chair by the fire, wearing a black lace gown with only a small breast-knot of crimson to relieve the sable hue, she looked strikingly handsome. Mrs. Courtney, in an easy chair on the opposite side, gave her a placid glance of approval now and then; and Flora Paget, turning over the leaves of a book of engravings, looked up once or twice to make a face at Aunt Rosanne. Aunt and niece had had a great fight that day upstairs, and out of granny's hearing.

"Flora is very pale this evening," said Lady Rosanne, breaking a long silence. "I do think, granny, dear, that she ought to go to bed at eight. What would my complexion have been if they had let me sit up late when I was a child? One has to be doubly careful with dark girls, else they grow up fearfully sallow."

"I believe you are quite right," replied Mrs. Courtney, with unusual animation. "Flora, you will go to your room at eight precisely."

"Aunt Rosanne wants to get rid of me because Mr. de Wilton will be here," said Flora in a rage. "She hates me, granny."

"If I hated you I should let you sit up and get perfectly yellow," Lady Rosanne answered, composedly. "As it is, I consider your future appearance, and get abused for showing a true interest in you. But you will know me better one day, mademoiselle."

"I don't want to know you any better than I do now. I wish Mr. de Wilton knew you as well as I do!" cried Flora.

"Nonsense, darling," said granny, placidly; "Mr. de Wilton has known your aunt for years."

"She is afraid I shall tell him what I think of her;" Flora declared. "She does not care a straw about my complexion, granny. Do let me sit up till nine to-night!"

"If you really loved granny you would do as she wishes, Flora," said Rosanne.

"I love her better than you do, Aunt Rosanne. I know that you only pretend to like staying here. Now I'm really happy in this dear old house, and you want to turn me out of it."

"I am anxious for your good, Flora, that is all. If I had not been perfectly certain that you would be happy with Miss Noel I would not have advised granny to send you to Cedar House."

"I shall never be happy there. And I'm getting on well enough here with my governess."

Rosanne prudently kept silence. A little clock on the mantelpiece chimed half-past six; a bright flame leaped up from the fire, and played on her black lace skirts and the small jewelled hands lying idly on her lap. It flickered over granny's gay cap-ribbons and contented old face,

and even sent a gleam across Flora, sitting moodily in her lamp-lit corner. Rosanne gave a long, soft sigh, and listened eagerly for the sound of the hall door bell.

If it was dull here, it was also very comfortable, she thought. Any one might live peaceably with granny; the house was good, the servants well-trained. If she were to marry Arnold they might spend a good deal of their time here, doing just as they pleased, and taking the management of everything into their own hands. Then the bell was rung; and Flora looked sharply at her aunt, who was conscious of her glance, and did not stir. In the next minnte Arnold walked in.

"He looks sadder than ever, and his face is getting thin and worn," said Rosanne to herself. She threw a deeper shade of gravity into her own manner as she greeted him, and there was something soothing in her gentleness. He drew a chair near to hers; granny saw the little movement, and smiled approval, while Flora glared at them angrily over her book.

But a man does not always seek love where he seeks sympathy, as Rosanne was to find out later on. Affairs, however, really seemed to wear a promising aspect, and she was just beginning a conversation in that new soft voice of hers, when Flora shut her book with a bang, and bounced across the room to his side.

"The child is always restless on Sunday evenings," remarked granny, by way of excuse.

"No, granny, it isn't Sunday evening that makes me restless," said Flora, in a solemn tone. "It is Aunt Rosanne who has unsettled my mind. She has come here and made my life miserable. I shall tell Mr. de Wilton everything."

"Flora is not quite herself to-day," persisted the old lady, while Rosanne sighed slightly and was silent.

"Yes, granny, I'm quite myself. Mr. de Wilton, I've no one to take my part; granny is a dear, but she doesn't see things properly. In the old history days there was always a man in splendid armour to help a girl in distress;—only they weren't called girls then, but damsels. I don't think we have got on so well since they have left off calling us damsels."

"I will address you as 'damsel' every day," said Rosanne, "if that will make you good-tempered."

"The word would be simply horrid if it came from your lips, Aunt Rosanne," cried Flora, reddening. "Mr. de Wilton, I did mean to be quite calm, but she sits there looking like—like the false Duessa in the Faery Queene!"

"Granny lets her read anything," murmured Rosanne.

"Just listen, Mr. de Wilton!" Flora laid her hand on his shoulder to claim his attention. "Before Aunt Rosanne came, I was living here comfortably with

granny, and getting on very well with my daily governess. And now *she* has persuaded granny to send me to school, —some hateful school that she has heard of, where they have plenty of punishments and nothing nice to eat. She wants to get rid of me, you see. She knows I shall soon be in my teens and long frocks, and then I shall make her look old!"

Lady Rosanne smiled valiantly.

"Now that you have exposed my base designs," she said, "you may go on and tell Mr. de Wilton the name of the school and of the lady principal."

"I will." Flora nodded defiantly. "It is a horrid place called Cedar House, and the head of it is a Miss Noel."

Arnold's face, which had been wearing a slight smile of amusement, suddenly became grave again.

"It is true that I want to send my little niece to Cedar House," said Rosanne gently, "because one of the most charming girls I ever knew was a pupil of Miss Noel's. I am certain you have not forgotten, Arnold, how lovingly she used to speak of the college? If Flora grows up half as sweet and good as she was, it will make me happy indeed."

"I'm sure you don't want me to be sweet and good," Flora began. But Arnold stopped her, kindly yet firmly.

"Your aunt could not have given you a greater proof

of kindness," he said. "If you had known the lady she spoke of, dear, you would have longed to grow up like her."

"Was it some one you loved very much?" asked Flora, eagerly, forgetting her grievance for the moment.

"Very, very much," he answered, in a quiet voice.

"Oh, is she dead?"

"I suppose she is, Flora; but sometimes I hardly know what to think."

Lady Rosanne could not help starting, and a sudden fear darted swiftly into her brain. What if Arnold had brooded over his loss until his reason had given way? But he was not the kind of man to nurse a delusion, and she began to ask herself, with a cold feeling of dread, whether Cissy Dysart's death had been announced by mistake? And then she remembered Mrs. Hope's letter, relating all the particulars to Lady de Wilton, and felt that the fact of the death was established beyond doubt or dispute.

"Arnold, what do you mean?" she asked, almost in a whisper. "Can the matter be uncertain? Surely not."

The butler appeared at the door as she was speaking, and Arnold rose and gave his arm to Mrs. Courtney. Rosanne followed them into the dining-room without giving a thought to Flora, who flounced along by her side. No one seemed to be much inclined for conversation at

the table; granny always enjoyed her dinner, and did not want to talk; and Flora was subdued at last. Rosanne had scored a victory over her niece, but she was too much preoccupied to triumph.

When the clock struck eight Mrs. Courtney exerted herself so far as to send her little grand-daughter to bed; and Flora, really humbled, departed without making a scene. When she was gone, granny began to nod in her easy chair, and Rosanne sat looking deep into the glowing coals, and waiting for Arnold to return to the drawing-room. Her pictures in the fire were not so bright as those she had seen a little while ago. For the first time she had heard him openly confess that he had loved Miss Dysart. She had known the truth all through—known it from the first, at Heatherdown, before any one else had suspected it in the least. But his plain avowal had made the fact seem more substantial than it had ever been before.

It was a fact that Rosanne would have utterly abolished if she could. She had disliked that girl in life, and she feared and detested her even in death. Arnold de Wilton had had his fancies and flirtations, and she had always looked on composedly, believing that some day he would come back to her—not as the boyish adorer, but the calm, matter-of-fact suitor who knew his own mind. But she had never known what it was to be really jealous till

Miss Dysart came to Heatherdown. The fresh schoolgirl beauty had won his heart, and he was constant to her still. Rosanne clenched her hands, and looked into the fire with eyes that shone with passionate anger. Then, at the sound of his footsteps, she calmed herself, and sank back in her chair. He must not see her agitated; she must be all softness and sweetness if she would win his confidence, and find out the meaning of his mysterious words.

"Ah," she said, speaking in a low tone lest granny should wake out of her light slumber, "I have been sitting here and seeing faces in the fire! You often do that, I know."

"Yes," he answered.

"I have not cared to put my sympathy into set phrases, Arnold; but I have thought a great deal about your sorrow. Is it possible for one's heart to be softened by a friend's grief? I think it is; I know I have softened since you have suffered."

"Thank you, Rosanne; you have been most kind."

"She charmed me unawares into liking her," she went on, spreading out her small, white hands, and letting the firelight dance upon her glittering rings. "How wonderfully fresh and sweet she was! But tell me, Arnold, what did you mean by that strange answer to Flora's question? Have you been startled by any news?"

"I have been startled, but not by any news."

"Something has happened then? Something which has disturbed you?"

"Yes. One hardly knows how to speak of it."

She waited, her heart throbbing with the wildest impatience, feeling that it would not be wise to ply him with questions. But at last he did speak.

"I have seen her twice," he said, a brown pallor stealing over his face. "Not her ghost, Rosanne; not some one very much like her, but *herself*."

It seemed to Lady Rosanne that her heart had stopped beating, and everything in the world was standing still. Was he mad? No, she could not think so while she looked at his strong face and steady eyes; but there was some riddle to be solved, and even her quick wit was incapable of solving it. Then, instead of bursting out into exclamations of unbelief as a weaker woman would have done, she spoke calmly.

"Where have you seen her, Arnold?"

"First, a week ago, when I was buying some violets in a shop in Vere Street. She was looking in through the window at the flowers, and her eyes met mine. I saw a look of terror come into her face; and she fled, and went, I think, into Marshall's. I waited for her to come out, but missed her."

"And the second time?"

"Was yesterday morning. She came out of a shop in Regent Street, and almost touched me. I was talking to Bellamy, but I left him, and tried to speak to her. She was too quick for me, and sprang into a hansom. I called another cab, and told the man to follow; and then the horse fell down, and I lost her just as I was sure of finding her."

"And does she not seem at all changed? Does she look as she did at Heatherdown?"

"Just the same, but a little paler. Rosanne, it is a great mystery."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FOUND OUT.

"IT is a great mystery."

Rosanne could only repeat the words; she did not attempt to argue the point, nor did she once suggest that he had been deceived by a strong resemblance. Both were silent for a little while, and there were no sounds to break the pause save granny's monotonous breathing and the tramp of footsteps in the street outside. Those footsteps! Perhaps even at this moment *she* might be passing by the house, and looking up at the lighted window of the room where they were sitting. Rosanne shivered slightly, and drew closer to the fire. Arnold saw the movement, and laid his hand upon her arm with a kind touch.

"You have been very good in listening with patience," he said, with genuine feeling in his tone. "Most people would have talked about hallucinations, and advised me to consult a doctor. But you do not seem to doubt my statement in the least."

"Because I do not doubt you," she answered, fixing her large bright eyes on his. "Because I know you to

be remarkably sensible and clear-headed. Yet, consider a moment. Was she in all respects the same girl that you saw at Heatherdown? There are little differences that only a woman's glance takes note of. Her dress—did any change strike you in that?"

He did consider, silently, for a second or two.

"There was a change in dress," he admitted at last. "She used to dress beautifully, you know; my aunt has often said so. And now her clothes are very plain. She wore a kind of cloth, or velvet, cap on her head, and was wrapped in a long black cloak. She carried a parcel, I think; and somehow I was impressed with the idea that she was poorer than she used to be."

Rosanne drew a deep breath of relief. At length she was sure that it was no dead girl restored to life who had crossed his path. It was probably some beautiful young woman of the lower class, whose likeness to Miss Dysart was remarkable enough to mystify him. If he could have heard her speak, the spell would have been broken at once.

"Miss Dysart could not possibly become poor," she said, thoughtfully. "The voice would have told you everything. I wish she had not been silent."

"I could not be mistaken in her eyes," he replied. "They spoke plainly enough; I could read recognition first, and then the desire to escape. I wonder why she wanted to fly from me? She had no fear of me once."

"I cannot think that she would fear you now, if she were really Miss Dysart. Surely she would fly to you as to a friend."

"It troubled me to see her afraid," he said, with a sigh. "Rosanne, you will not tell any one of these strange experiences of mine? And, perhaps, I may never meet her again."

"You may trust me, Arnold. But I hope you will meet her again; I want the matter to be cleared up. I wish I could meet her, myself; she should not escape me, and I would make her speak."

He rose to take his leave, and his gaze lingered kindly on Rosanne. Kindly, not lovingly. His heart was with the phantom which fled from him.

"You will come again soon," she said, earnestly. "To-morrow, or the day after to-morrow? Perhaps we shall find out something, either you or I."

"You are very kind to me," he answered. "Your sympathy has done me good. Yes, I will soon come again."

Mrs. Courtney woke up just in time to say good-night, and to remark that the evening had flown very quickly.

"We are quite dull when we are alone, Rosanne and I," she said. "I daresay I should have gone to sleep, Mr. de Wilton, if you had not been here; and that would have spoiled my night's rest. I hope you will come often, and keep us both awake."

That night Rosanne sat long over her bedroom fire, and

saw the pleasant pictures arise in the glowing coals again. If she could only convince him that Cissy Dysart no longer walked this earth in human shape, she might hope to make herself indispensable to him. Already they were better friends than they had ever been before. Her judicious display of sympathetic feeling had done wonders. All her energies must now be devoted to finding this girl who was so strangely like his lost love, and proving to him that the resemblance was only skin-deep. And then she remembered that she had arranged to go to Kensington on Monday, and call on Miss Noel. Flora Paget was to be received, if possible, as a boarder in Cedar House after Christmas. From Miss Noel she might learn something more about Cissy Dysart and her life at school, and it was even probable that she might obtain some additional details of the fatal voyage. Not a stone should be left unturned, thought Rosanne, as she left her fireside chair at last, and rested her busy head on the pillow.

Mrs. Courtney was well pleased that De Wilton should pay attention to her grandchild. Rosanne's father, the Earl of Eden, had died, leaving his affairs in an unsettled state; and Rosanne, considering her rank, was very slenderly provided for. But with such striking beauty as hers, it had been naturally expected that she would make a good match; and great was the disappointment of her friends when season after season passed by, and left her

still unmarried. It was just possible that she was too flashing—too brilliant. The woman who—

"Steals on your spirit like a May-day breaking,"

has often succeeded where her more sparkling sister has failed. Anyhow, up to the present time, Lady Rosanne *had* failed; but there seemed to be good reason to hope that this calm friendship with Arnold de Wilton would end in love.

The girls at the college were laying plans for their Christmas holidays, and getting tired of the jog-trot routine of school-life. Now that the time of release was near, they were impatient for freedom, and there was more inattention than usual, and more stealthy whispering and fidgeting. Miss Noel, who rarely allowed herself the privilege of being an invalid, was obliged, for once, to succumb to a bad cold, and could not leave her bedroom. And Miss Grain reigned in her stead, and had faces made at her behind her back, and was caricatured and secretly reviled from Saturday morning till Monday night. It was now Monday afternoon, chill and misty out of doors, but warm and comfortable enough in the old house which Cissy and Cherry had known so well. Withered leaves strewed the paths which they had trodden together, linked arm in arm in their romantic friendship: the old cedars, that had so often sheltered those two bright heads on sunny days, stood heavy and dark under the November sky. Lady Rosanne, passing through the iron gates,

thought that the college looked gloomy enough to tame the wildest spirit; and rejoiced in the hope that Flora would soon be shut up safely within its massive walls.

But there was no gloom in the pretty room in which she sat to wait for Miss Noel's coming. She noted the flourishing ferns; the bright little knick-knacks; the luxurious chairs; and, above all, the blazing fire, and felt that the days of the grim schoolmistress were past. Then Miss Grain entered, and apologized for Miss Noel; and Rosanne began at once to speak of the future pupil.

"I think I have met more than one of your former pupils," she remarked, when Flora Paget had been sufficiently discussed. "One of the sweetest girls I ever knew came from this house. You must all have been distressed when Miss Dysart died on her voyage to India."

"Yes; we were deeply distressed; but we always felt that she was very fragile," Miss Grain answered. If Miss Noel had been consulted she would not have allowed the dear girl to sail. We had many misgivings when she left us."

"Yet she did not seem at all delicate when she was at Heatherdown. I was staying with the De Wiltons while she was there, and we all thought her perfectly well and strong."

"Ah, pardon me, but there is a little mistake," Miss Grain replied. "Cissy Dysart never went to Heatherdown. Lady de Wilton wrote and asked her to spend the mid-summer holidays there; but she was not well enough to

go, poor child. She remained here, under Miss Noel's care, until the order came for her to sail with her father's friends, the Hopes. It was quite a sudden summons; she had not thought of leaving us till the end of the year."

Well-trained woman of the world though she was, Rosanne stared at the speaker in blank stupefaction. She was on the brink of a discovery indeed; and what a discovery! Among all the wild surmises that had entered her brain;—among all the improbable things that she had thought of in trying to account for Cissy's supposed reappearance, there was nothing so strange and startling as the truth. The vivid rose-colour faded out of her cheeks, and her eyes looked so wide and brilliant that Miss Grain was half frightened.

"Cissy Dysart—never went—to Heatherdown!"

She gasped the words out rather than spoke them.

"No, she certainly never went there," replied the teacher, slowly and gravely.

"Then who could it have been who came there under her name? Who was the pretty schoolgirl, fresh from Cedar House, who won all hearts? Whoever she was, and wherever she is, I will find her out," said Rosanne.

Miss Grain shut her lips, and shook her head hopelessly. She could only suppose that one of those dreadful women one reads about in papers,—a ladylike confederate of burglars,—had succeeded in getting into Heatherdown.

She was just about to ask whether any jewels or plate had been missed, when Lady Rosanne spoke again.

"You said that Miss Dysart declined the invitation," she went on. "Yet Lady de Wilton had a letter from her, written from this house, saying that she would come, and enclosing a photograph. She did come, as I have told you; and no one imagined for a moment that she was not the girl she seemed to be. It is most important, for many reasons, that this matter should be investigated. If, therefore, you have a portrait of Miss Dysart here, I hope you will be kind enough to let me see it."

Rosanne had now mastered her agitation, and spoke with perfect calmness and a slight air of authority. Miss Grain inclined her head, rose, went to the mantelpiece, and brought back Cissy Dysart's portrait.

"This is an excellent likeness, taken last May," she said, as she put the picture into Rosanne's hand.

Rosanne looked at it long and earnestly.

"It is very much like the girl who came to Heatherdown," she said. "But this face is thinner, and the figure is slighter. Have you any more portraits of Miss Dysart?"

As she spoke she caught sight of one or two framed faces on the mantelpiece, and got up from her seat and crossed the room to inspect them closely. Miss Grain, much puzzled and bewildered, followed her, devoutly wishing

that Miss Noel was well enough to come downstairs, and answer all the questions that this embarrassing young lady chose to ask. Then Rosanne, with a little cry of triumph, suddenly turned towards her, holding up the portrait of Cherry Dent.

"Here she is!" she cried. "The other girl looks like her delicate sister; but this was our mysterious guest. Don't you see that she must have gone to Heatherdown with a full knowledge of all Miss Dysart's concerns? If she had not been well informed on all points, she must have been detected. Who is she? What is her real name?"

"That is Cherry Dent." As Miss Grain was speaking a light broke over her hard-featured face, and she, too, looked as if she were on the brink of a discovery. "Cherry Dent, Miss Dysart's bosom friend and inseparable companion. I have seen a great many of those bosom friendships, and I don't believe that any good ever comes out of them."

"It was Cherry Dent who came to Heatherdown; that is quite clear," said Rosanne calmly. "Who is the girl? And where is she now?"

"She is,—well, I don't know that I ought to say so,—but she is a girl of humble origin." Miss Grain really enjoyed making this disclosure. "It was intended that she should be a governess, but she always wanted to be a dressmaker; and a dressmaker she is at this moment."

"That explains many things," said Rosanne, her

thoughts going back to the *tableaux*, and Cherry's skill in making the quaint bridal dress. "But where is she? For it is absolutely necessary that I should find her."

Miss Grain gave the required address without hesitation.

"I am shocked," she said, "truly shocked to find that Cherry Dent has been guilty of a base and daring fraud. I can't say that I ever believed in the girl as Miss Noel did; and I always thought it a mistake to permit her close intimacy with Miss Dysart. But our poor Cissy was a confirmed invalid, and no one could refuse her anything. She was quite infatuated about Cherry, partly, I think, because they were so much alike. Everyone would have taken them for sisters, and I daresay it was that unfortunate resemblance which suggested the trick. They must have laid their plans together."

"We cannot say that Miss Dysart had anything to do with the abominable deception," said Rosanne loftily. "She was a lady, and she would not have lent herself to anything so hateful. The plot owed its origin to this low girl's designing brain. She has done mischief, terrible mischief, and she must be exposed, or she will do more yet."

"Oh, I hope you won't accuse her of anything really atrocious!" cried Miss Grain, thoroughly frightened. "If she were brought into a court, you know, it would be an awful thing for Cedar House. I wasn't fond of her; I seldom allow myself to get too fond of the pupils—but I

am sure she always behaved fairly well when she was here. And I am certain that it was Cissy, not Cherry, who devised the scheme. Cissy was romantic, absurdly romantic; and she was just the girl to amuse herself with schemes."

"Don't be too much concerned," said Lady Rosanne quietly. "The honour of Cedar House shall not be tarnished; and no one will bring Cherry Dent into a court. The mischief that she has done is not of the kind that can be punished by law. She has made a man of good family fall in love with her, believing her to be, of course, Sir Reginald Dysart's daughter. And if he had not heard of the real Miss Dysart's death, he would have gone to India to find her."

"Oh, this is truly dreadful!" Miss Grain was much relieved that things were no worse; but she lifted her hands in horror. "And that explains another puzzle. On the day of dear Cissy's departure, a young man,—evidently a gentleman,—came here to ask if she had really gone? I knew that poor Cissy had no lovers or friends outside the school, and I could not imagine who he was! I saw that he was really distressed."

"He will never be distressed on her account any more," said Lady Rosanne grimly. And then, after quieting Miss Grain with several civil speeches, she went her way in triumph.

CHAPTER XXXV.

TWO WOMEN.

THE work was not quite as heavy as it had been; a good many people's wants had been supplied; and on Monday evening Effie Comyn went out for an hour or two to see a sick friend. It was now eight o'clock; Cherry's hands were still busy, but her thoughts were not in her business, and she was weary with the constant effort to come to a decision. Never had the weakness of her nature been so apparent to herself as it was in these troubled hours. All that was noble and reasonable within her urged her to put herself into Mr. Mornay's hands, and let him tell her story to Arnold de Wilton in his own way. That it would be a wise way she did not doubt; but her foolish heart still hung back from the inevitable disclosure. Often in her loneliness and sadness she had found a kind of morbid comfort in the thought that Arnold loved her memory still. To him she would be always the Cissy Dysart who

had climbed the Delectable Mountains by his side, and had gone before him to that Celestial City which they had both beheld in a waking dream. And young as she was, she understood that it is a good thing for a man to keep a fair unsullied portrait of a woman in his life. It would be well indeed, if all our girls realized this truth, and remembered always that they paint the portrait with their own hands. As they paint it, so it will stay; darkly beautiful as a fallen angel, or white and fair as a saint, it will hang in the secret chamber of a man's brain for ever and ever.

In a little while he would know—he must know—that it was not Cissy the good and true, but Cherry the mean and deceitful, who had won his love. And the love would change, if not into absolute dislike, yet into something very near akin to contempt. Mr. Mornay might set her conduct in as favourable a light as he could; but he would never win for her anything more than a half scornful forgiveness. Arnold had been cheated, shamefully cheated; and many a man who can freely pardon an insult will remember a cheat to his dying day.

Fully occupied with these miserable thoughts, Cherry went on tacking and arranging, and the girls went on stitching under the light of the shaded gas-burners, until the little maid-of-all-work put her head in at the door of the work-room, and said—

"If you please, a lady has come to see Miss Dent."

Cissy rose at once, too much absorbed in her own musings even to wonder who her visitor could be. Quietly and composedly she turned the handle of the parlour door and went in; but then, before she had got half-way across the room, she stopped short, with a stifled cry of terror and dismay.

Standing upright by the mantelpiece was a lady, wearing a furred mantle over a long black lace dress. Her face was scarcely shaded by the small hat she wore; and her large eyes flashed upon the frightened girl who had been so suddenly summoned into her presence. There was, perhaps, no one on earth who could have inspired Cherry with such deadly terror as Lady Rosanne. At Heatherdown, even when Rosanne had flattered and caressed her she had read the pitiless nature of the woman, and dreaded the thought of her enmity. And now, here was her worst fear realized at last. Before a word was uttered, before those cruel red lips unclosed, Cherry knew by the fierce triumphant light in the eyes that her secret was found out by one who would show no mercy.

"So this is the young person who stole Miss Dysart's name," began Lady Rosanne in her clear, hard voice. "This is the estimable dressmaker who lied herself into good society! And it is my hand that has torn your

mask off;—it will be my delightful task to make your story known to all the people you met at Heatherdown! Do you know, you contemptible impostor, that I have you wholly in my power? This very day I have been to Cedar House, and learnt the history of the fraud from beginning to end."

"Then Miss Noel knows at last!" Cherry breathed the words rather than spoke them; but Lady Rosanne's sharp ear caught the agonized whisper.

"Yes; Miss Noel knows at last. I have seen and talked with the head teacher, who, by the way, has no very good opinion of you. I can understand how you used your influence over that poor weak invalid girl, until she promised to help you in your scheme. I can understand how you made use of her money, as well as of her name, to carry out your shameful plot ——"

"Oh no, no! Indeed it was Uncle Barnaby's money. He gave me enough to pay for travelling and other expenses while I was at school."

"You made use of Sir Reginald Dysart's money, wheedled out of his delicate daughter," Rosanne went on. "Don't suppose that you can whitewash the affair; it is as black as it possibly can be, and no one will accept any of your feeble excuses. If that poor girl had lived you might have persuaded her even to take the blame on herself; I know to what absurd lengths the affection of

a romantic schoolgirl will go. But she is dead, and you cannot bring her back from the grave to speak in your favour."

Afterwards, when events had taken a turn which they had never expected, these bitter words came back to both women. But at that moment Rosanne could have said nothing that would smite Cherry with a keener sense of helplessness than this. Unless Cissy's voice could travel across the gulf that separates the living from the dead, there was no one to speak a word in her friend's defence. And the case, as Rosanne had stated it, did indeed look black enough to doom the unhappy Cherry to life-long contempt. No one who had not known Cissy Dysart would have believed in the strength of will and force of character which that fragile girl had possessed. No one would have thought that so slight and delicate a creature would have had the power to sway all the minds that came into contact with her own. Yet Cissy had this power in a great degree, and even Miss Noel had often asked herself if she did well in yielding to her pupil's fancies. Cissy was so gentle, so charming, and so inflexibly resolute that she never failed to win the thing on which she had set her heart.

" Lately," Rosanne continued with increasing bitterness, " you have thrown yourself in Mr. de Wilton's way, and then vanished, ghost-like, just to try to rouse his curiosity.

Well, his curiosity has been aroused, and now it will speedily be satisfied. He came to me with the strange tale of Miss Dysart's reappearance, and I promised to solve the riddle if I could. He took me into his confidence, you see, and was grateful for my help and sympathy. And he will be more grateful yet when I prove to him that it was no ghost whom he met, but a creature of very common flesh and blood;—a base, designing creature, actuated by the lowest motives;—a creature he will never recall to his thoughts without a feeling of disgust and scorn. Mark me, I know Mr. de Wilton well; I have studied him from boyhood. And I know that he can forgive anything,—anything in the world,—save deceit."

Cherry stood motionless as a statue; her hands clasped, her head drooping, her face pale as death. And even in this moment of her utter degradation and woe, she looked so beautiful, and so strangely incapable of all the meanness that had been attributed to her, that Rosanne felt the sharp sting of a sudden fear. If Arnold were to see her again, might not the spell of her beauty be powerful enough to win his pardon? He must not—should not—be allowed to see her again. Rosanne determined, there and then, that the girl should never have a chance of saying a word in her own defence.

For a few moments the two women stood facing each

other in silence, and it was Cherry who broke the pause, speaking so softly and wearily that the other was startled by her very quietness.

"I always thought I should be found out one day," she said. "You disliked me from the first, I know, and you are resolved to believe the very worst of me. Well, you must believe it, that is all; for Cissy—my poor dear Cissy—is not here to defend me now. You have said all the bitter things you can think of, Lady Rosanne, and perhaps, after this, you will be content to leave me in peace. You need not suppose that I have escaped unpunished; I suffer, and shall always suffer for this fault of mine to the end of my life."

"The game was hardly worth the candle, was it?" Rosanne's lip curled. "You are fond of reading, and I daresay you know the Lady of Lyons. Claude Melnotte's part was base enough, played by a man; but it has always struck me that it would have been ten times baser if he had been a woman. For a woman to entrap a man, who is infinitely above her in rank, into making love to her, is, I think, the meanest thing in the world. And there is only one reparation that she can make."

"What is that?" Cherry asked faintly.

"If she keeps one atom of self-respect,—if she has one grain of right feeling—she will never cross his path again. She will do all in her power to spare him

the pain and humiliation of meeting the woman who has deceived him. She will hope and pray that he will forget her very existence for his own sake."

Cherry lifted her head slowly, and looked at Rosanne with eyes so full of sorrow that a more pitiful heart could not have borne their gaze for an instant. But Rosanne, watching her intently, did not relent in the least.

"I want him to forget me," Cherry said, with a slight sob. "You are right; to think of me is only a humiliation. But—do me this one kindness, Lady Rosanne,—believe that when I went to Heatherdown I did not even dream of winning his love. Only believe this."

"Yes, I do believe it," Rosanne answered, after a pause. "I can understand that love did not enter into the scheme. But if you had been older and wiser you would have known that love is the greatest marplot that ever was. It has spoiled thousands of clever plans, and will go on thwarting and frustrating the designs of men and women to the end of time. As to Arnold de Wilton's feeling about you, it will die a natural death. You, merely Cherry Dent, stripped of all the associations and traditions that surrounded Miss Dysart, he would never have loved at all. And if you will promise never to fling yourself in his way, never even to seek his forgiveness, I will really try to think as charitably of you as I can."

"I do promise," said Cherry, solemnly. "I will stay

indoors and work, and if I am compelled to go out I will choose the least frequented ways. I cannot leave London; I have, as you know, to earn my bread here. But perhaps he will not remain?"

"I don't think he will remain. I am almost sure he will go down to Heatherdown; and he has talked lately of travelling," replied Rosanne. "You will be easier if you know that he has gone out of town?"

"Oh, much easier! It will be the greatest relief to feel that I need not fear a chance meeting."

Rosanne looked at her again keenly, and saw that she was sincere.

"I think you will soon be relieved," she said in a gentler tone. "And I do not mind telling you that I feel more kindly disposed towards you than I did. You know that I am an old friend of the De Wiltons, and I saw that the sorrow you caused Arnold was a trouble to them all. He was just beginning to recover a little after the shock of Miss Dysart's death,—just beginning to be like his former self, when he saw you again in Vere Street."

"Oh, it was not my fault that we met!" cried Cherry in sore distress.

"Perhaps not; I will take your word. But the meeting had a most disastrous effect upon him. He began almost to doubt his own sanity. It was well for him,—well indeed for all of us,—that he confided in me, and

that I listened with patience instead of making light of the matter. Do you not see how cruel you have been to him? Do you not think that, if he had been a weaker man, you might even have unsettled his reason?"

"I do see that I have been very cruel and wicked," Cherry said humbly. "Lady Rosanne, I will do all that you wish; indeed, there is no atonement that I would not make. I am truly penitent and miserable."

"Your only atonement is to be silent, and efface yourself," Rosanne answered, moving towards the door. "Keep your promise, and I, on my part, will leave you in peace."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DISILLUSION.

LADY ROSANNE went to her room that night with a proud consciousness of victory. What a hard day's work she had done, and yet her strength was not exhausted! She was quite equal to the task that lay before her still—the interview with Arnold de Wilton to-morrow. After leaving Cedar House she had sent him a telegram containing only these words:

"Come to me after breakfast. I have solved the riddle."

She said to herself that those few words would bring him speedily enough—bring him full of gratitude and eager expectation. And she had no doubt now about the future at all, so far as his feeling for Cherry was concerned. He would burn with a man's natural indignation at having been duped; and then he would realize that he had lost even the memory of his girlish love, and that this loss could never be made good to him while he lived in

the world. This revelation would harden him a little, Rosanne thought; it would take away some of the romantic ideas which had always clung about his mind, and hindered its practical working. He would be more ready to believe that the thoroughly-trained society woman may be, after all, as honourable and truthful as your bread-and-butter miss, fresh from the school-room. That women are pretty much alike at all ages, and under all circumstances, was one of Rosanne's favourite sayings; but hitherto she had not succeeded in making Arnold agree with her. Well, his faith in perfect freshness and ingenuousness was about to be very rudely shaken at last. The disclosure of Cherry's fraud would bring him down to Rosanne's level, she was sure; he would feel that it is better to tread on the plain of common worldly wisdom than to climb heights and find nothing but fog and disenchantment.

Yet, as she closed her eyes and tried to sleep, she was haunted by a vision of Cherry's face. That beautiful sorrowful face pleaded eloquently for its owner; her deeds spoke one language and her face another. Rosanne congratulated herself on having won the girl's solemn promise to keep out of Arnold's sight. Such a face as hers was dangerous, and always would be dangerous, no matter what foolish things she had done.

Morning came; and Rosanne (who was usually brisk)

for once followed granny's example and breakfasted in her own room. She could not face a *tête-à-tête* meal with Flora downstairs that day. Flora detested her, and was always watching her looks, and trying to find out what was in her mind. And Rosanne, who had just now a good deal of excitement to suppress, could not run the risk of being irritated by her little niece.

The breakfast-room was also used as Flora's school-room, and Rosanne knew that the child would be safely shut up there with her governess. She was handsomer than ever when she went down to receive Arnold in the empty drawing-room, and she had paid careful attention to her appearance. Her tailor-made gown of dark crimson cloth fitted her to perfection; her cheeks glowed with their richest hue. And although his mind was full of eager anxiety, Arnold could not help the momentary thought that it was a pleasant thing on a dreary day to see a bit of brilliant colour like Rosanne.

"Well," he said, standing with his back to the fire, and looking at her with expectant eyes, "I have come to hear your news."

"Wonderful news, indeed," she answered, gravely. "But not pleasant news. Arnold, we have all been shamefully imposed upon and deceived."

"Deceived—how? You cannot mean that the announcement of Miss Dysart's death was false?"

How he still clung to the faintest hope of that girl's existence! Rosanne shook her head, and spoke more gravely still.

"No, no, Arnold; her death is a sad truth. But you must prepare yourself for a very great surprise. What will you say when I tell you that we have never seen Cissy Dysart at all?"

"What can I say, Rosanne? You know, as well as I do, that she was our guest at Heatherdown. Is this a new riddle? I hope not, for I am thoroughly sick of riddles."

"So am I," she answered, sighing. "I was only trying to break the strange news, but it is best to say things straight out. Well, it was not Miss Dysart who went to Heatherdown; it was a schoolfellow of hers, a girl of humble birth, who wanted to get a glimpse of society. And she stole Miss Dysart's name, and personated her successfully."

For a moment or two Arnold was struck dumb. Never, in his wildest fancies, had he even caught the faintest glimmer of the real fact, and after the first shock of astonishment was over, it seemed to him to be utterly preposterous and absurd. Rosanne, who was quietly watching him, had prepared herself for the burst of angry incredulity which followed her disclosure of the truth. He stood before her, flushed, agitated, strangely unlike his

usual calm self; and his words poured out rapidly, with all the impetuous haste of indignation.

"I always thought you had plenty of shrewdness, Rosanne; but some one has been deluding you with the most ridiculous tale I have ever heard. You have forgotten the letter received from Miss Dysart after her sudden departure; you have forgotten, too, that Mrs. Hope wrote to my aunt from India, telling her how the poor girl died! Is it possible that you can credit such a silly story? If this is all that you have to tell me, the riddle is a riddle still."

"It is not a riddle to me, Arnold." Her manner was very quiet and gentle. "I went yesterday to Cedar House, and learnt that Cissy Dysart had been too delicate to accept Lady de Wilton's invitation. She never left the college till she went on board with the Hopes and sailed for India. And I learnt, too, that her dearest friend was Cherry Dent, a girl who was strikingly like her. You have Cherry's photograph already in your possession, and I have borrowed poor Cissy Dysart's portrait. Here it is."

She held it out to him; and he took it, and looked at it long and earnestly.

"Of course Cherry Dent could not have duped us without Cissy's assistance," Rosanne went on. "The plan was arranged between them; they settled everything, and

worked together; that is why they succeeded so well. But what disgusts me most is the meanness of this Cherry Dent, a girl who professed noble sentiments, and made us all believe in her as a superior being. She allowed Miss Dysart—a poor, weak, romantic invalid—to fit her out for her adventure. She accepted anything that the other liked to bestow—dress, trinkets, knick-knacks; nothing came amiss. And at Heatherdown it was the same. Lady de Wilton's love, so freely poured out on the supposed child of her old companion; Sir Henry's kindness, and—worst of all—your devotion. Yes, Arnold, you may be as angry with me as you please; but I may be forgiven if I watched my old playfellow with some anxiety. She was beautiful, and wonderfully clever in her own peculiar way, and she won from you a love you would never have given to any woman in whom you did not thoroughly believe. Oh, Arnold, I am sorry that she was a sham; in truth, I am sorry for your sake! I hate to see true feeling wasted."

She paused, and looked at him, pale with real emotion. There were tears in her large lustrous eyes; the first tears that he had ever seen her shed.

"Rosanne," he said, after a long pause, "you must pardon me if my mind cannot at once take in this story. I know you believe it—I know your sympathy with me is real; but to think of her as a deceiver ——"

"Ah, I knew it would be hard! I would have spared you if I could. But have I not heard you say that the cruelest truth is better than delusion?"

"Yes," he answered slowly. "And if all this has been delusion and waste of feeling, I ——"

The sentence was never finished. They stood fronting each other in silence; she, shedding tears that she did not attempt to hide; he, looking at her with eyes that did not see her at all. Never before had she seen those steady hazel eyes gazing so vacantly into space; and she knew that he was taking a farewell of his dream-love.

"Arnold," she said softly, "do you think you would realize things better if you went to Cedar House? They will tell you just the same story that I have told you; but if you talk to those who knew Cissy Dysart and had the care of her, they will help you to grasp the truth. At present you are in a fog; and, with the best intentions in the world, I can't make anything clear to you."

"No; I cannot go there," he replied in a low voice.

"Then write to Miss Noel? Or ask Lady de Wilton to write?"

"I will write—perhaps."

"That is well. And, Arnold, you will forgive me for the pain you have suffered? I did not know, of course, that I was going to make this dreadful discovery when I went to the college. I almost wish now that I had not

made it. And yet, if I had not, that strange reappearance would have always worried you."

"I am grateful to you, Rosanne—that is, I shall be grateful later on, when the fog has cleared away. You have acted wisely, and all is for the best."

He was trying to speak in his old manner; but she had never seen him so utterly unlike himself. Still, the interview had passed off much better than she had dared to hope, and his words to her, few as they were, had been soft and kind. Holding out her hand frankly, she looked up at him with eyes that were not yet dry, and smiled sadly.

"Let me have a line, Arnold, to tell me how you are," she said, in a gentle, sisterly tone. "I think it will do you good to go to Heatherdown as soon as you can. They are beginning to want you home again, and town is very dreary in this dark weather. In her last letter Lady de Wilton asked me if you had quite forsaken them?"

"I will go back to them," he answered with a curious submissiveness. "My old home is the best place for me."

"'Old things are best'—that's what one of the poets sings," said Rosanne, half gravely, half lightly. "I must be growing sentimental, for I often read poetry now-a-days. Goodbye, Arnold, and remember that I shall be looking out for those few lines."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TRIUMPH AND RESIGNATION.

ALL that Arnold de Wilton suffered in those dark November days he never told a single human being. The sense of loss was ever present with him, night and day. It was a "death in life" that he mourned for; an ideal love had been taken away,—snatched rudely out of his heart;—and the world seemed greyer and colder than it had ever been before. His faith in women was shaken; hitherto he had been one of those men who keep a natural reverence for women, and a belief in them that no worldly knowledge can entirely destroy. But this was changed. The lips that he had believed so pure and true had uttered lies; the nature that he had trusted in was capable of dishonourable dealing and deceit; the sweet face that he had loved was only a fair mask, hiding a mean and scheming soul.

After leaving Rosanne he went back to his chambers, and shut himself up to think, and write a letter to Miss

Noel. It was a very brief letter; he merely asked if it was an established fact that Miss Dysart had never visited Heatherdown? He did not expect to receive any comfort in the answer, nor did he get any. Miss Noel, much wrought upon by Miss Grain's account of Lady Rosanne's disclosures, had already written an indignant note to Cherry Dent. And Cherry, in quiet despair, had admitted the truth without making the slightest attempt at self-defence. It was no wonder, therefore, that the principal of the college, shocked, hurt, and angry to the last degree, should write to Mr. de Wilton, and deplore the deception in the strongest terms.

"I do not think I shall ever recover from this blow," she wrote. "No pupils have ever been dearer to me than those two girls, and now I have lost them both. From henceforth Cherry Dent must be to me as a stranger."

Yes; it was all true. And even this Miss Noel, who had been so often praised in his hearing, had turned against the impostor. He resolved to shake off her memory, and go about in the world as if she had never crossed his path; but who does not know how hard it is to banish the man or woman who has once occupied the heart's shrine? We may dethrone the image, and fling away every trace of worship; but the phantom of the old love will haunt the vacant place for many a day. To

some natures, forgetting is the hardest lesson that they have to learn in life.

He hoped that he might never see her again; and yet he could not walk into Vere Street without a thought of the grey eyes that had met his through the flower-shop window. And even the flowers themselves reminded him of her; had any other woman ever loved them so well? There are some women who are naturally associated with flowers, just as others are associated with jewels. The flash and glow of precious stones always came with a vision of Lady Rosanne; but he who dreamed of Cherry would remember the roses that she had worn in her hair and bosom; and their perfume would blend with every memory of pure and lovely things. And so he turned away from the flower-shop lest the violets should sigh out a thought of his lost love and give him a heart-ache. It would be best for him to go back to Heatherdown; yes, Rosanne was right. He would go.

Rosanne, in the dull house in Curzon Street, was waiting eagerly for news; but things had gone so well hitherto that she had a strong confidence in the prosperity of the future. Granny found her delightfully pleasant and obliging; and even Flora was constrained to admit that when Aunt Rosanne liked, she could be agreeable. Not that she was any fonder of this brilliant relative of hers; her quick childish instincts had taught her an un-

changing distrust; but she saw that it was quite possible for Lady Rosanne to win tolerance even from her enemies.

After a silence of three days the wished-for note arrived. Rosanne was not disappointed in it, and that is saying a great deal. It ran as follows:—

"Dear Rosanne,—I acted upon your suggestion, and wrote to Miss Noel. I think that the view she takes of Miss Dent's conduct is even darker than yours; but one does not care to say much about this matter. We will try to forget the affair, and avoid all reference to it in the future.

"I am going down to Heatherdown to-morrow, so that I am saying good-bye to you till after Christmas. My aunt expects you early in the new year, and Mrs. Courtney must be persuaded to spare you to us. Your sympathy has helped and soothed me; I had no right to expect so much kindness from you, dear Rosanne. You must not doubt my gratitude, even if I do not thank you again in words. I never was a good talker, you know. With kindest regards to yourself and Mrs. Courtney.—Believe me to be, ever yours most sincerely, ARNOLD DE WILTON."

It was the longest letter she had ever received from him since the days of his boyhood; and, although it contained nothing more than cordial friendliness, it gave her

intense satisfaction. In the first place it was clear that there was no longer any need to dread Cherry as a rival. Miss Noel had unconsciously played into Rosanne's hands; and there was now no fear that the culprit would ever be forgiven.

And in the next place there was the plain admission that a bond of sympathy was established between them; a bond which was not to be broken in the future although it might never be mentioned again. She was wise enough to know that a tie of this kind often creates a desire for one closer and dearer still. Any link between a man and a woman may be the beginning of a chain that shall bind them together for a lifetime.

After she had read the letter until she knew it by heart, she enclosed it, with a few lines, in an envelope addressed to Cherry Dent. Those few lines said that the note need not be returned; and that was all.

"It will deepen the girl's sense of hopelessness," she thought. "She will gaze at the words and brood over them till they are printed on her heart."

And that was exactly what Cherry did.

Day after day in South Molton Street those words of Arnold's were ringing in her ears. Night after night they were repeated in her dreams.

There was no reason now why she should remain indoors. He was gone, miles away, to Heatherdown, and

she might traverse the streets without any chance of an encounter. But Effie Comyn could not help seeing, with secret anxiety, that Cherry's daily walks seemed to do her little good. The girl worked with unflagging industry and patience; her taste and skill were always to be relied upon; no complaint of pain or weariness ever passed her lips. And yet she drooped, as a plant droops when it lacks air and sunshine; and her friends saw that some unspoken grief was blighting her beautiful youth.

"Are you not well, Cherry?" Effie would ask.

And the answer always came quite promptly and cheerfully—"Perfectly well, Effie; and fully contented with my work."

But there was one person who was not as easily silenced as Effie; and that was Mr. Mornay.

On Sunday afternoon Cherry was ever an expected visitor at the old house in Queen Anne Street. And there was a tranquil hour or two between the services, when Mr. Mornay sank into the depths of his easy chair; and Lucilla played her dreamy music, while Dora half-dozed beside her grandmother's silver urn, lulled by the comfortable purr of the great tabby cat at her feet. Then did Mr. Mornay talk to Cherry, in low tones, about that inner life of hers which she had so resolutely determined to live alone.

"He knows all, Mr. Mornay," she said, with quiet sad-

ness. "And he thinks as badly of me as it is possible for any one to think. Nothing will ever change his opinion. I shall always know that I am thoroughly despised by some one who ——"

"Who was very near loving you once, Cherry?"

"Yes."

"Either he is the sternest judge that a foolish schoolgirl ever had, or the matter has never been represented to him in the true light."

"Every one has believed the worst of me. It is quite natural; they have not heard what Cissy could have said in my defence."

"I have not heard what Cissy could have said in your defence; and yet, Cherry, I did not believe the worst of you."

"Ah," said Cherry, resignedly; "others are not like you. I think you go about in the world hunting for people's good qualities, and the things that we seek diligently we are almost sure to find. Or we fancy we have found them."

"It is not fancy, child. The good really does exist. But it is only those who have grown old in years and experience who can see that good is always to be found. It is not those who know the world best who believe most in its wickedness. A superficial knowledge of the world is sure to produce hopelessness; but out of the deeper knowledge comes hope."

"And you have that deeper knowledge, Mr. Mornay?"

"Yes; no matter how I gained it. I am steadily growing more cheerful and more hopeful as I grow older; and yet I am no optimist. But, Cherry, my child, you must cease to trouble yourself about this stern young man's good or bad opinion. You have erred and repented; and after repentance comes a beginning again;—a seeking of 'fresh woods and pastures new.' Ah, you don't want any new pastures! You would like to wander through the old haunts of memory, and listen to the echoes of the past! That is the way in which you young people fool away your youth."

Lucilla suddenly broke into the Priest's March in Athalie; and Cherry, sensitive to musical influences, as the finest natures always are, found herself lifted up unawares. Mr. Mornay saw her face brighten in the soft lamp-light.

"To-morrow," he said, "I am going to take you to a friend of mine, who makes a hobby of photography. He shall make a picture of you for us, and we will hang it up in this room to be admired by everybody who comes here. What, is that a blush? It is a good sign, Cherry; you are not turned into stone just yet. There's a little vanity left in you, and where there's vanity there is vitality."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NEWS.

ALL the woods and wayside banks of Heatherdown were thickly studded with primroses, and every little dingle in the park was filled with white violets to the brim. It was just such a morning as poets delight to praise in song; a morning that made life seem sweet, even to some who had little cause to rejoice. And from the old grey tower of the church, the bells were clashing out a merry peal "for joy that a man was born into the world."

Arnold de Wilton could share in that joy with a true heart, although the birth of his little cousin greatly lessened his importance in the eyes of society. If things had gone differently in his own life,—if he had indeed sought Sir Reginald Dysart's daughter for a wife,—then he might perhaps have winced at the sound of those gladsome bells. But now he could grasp his uncle's hand, and speak his congratulations with a warmth that was thoroughly genuine.

"I wish it didn't make any difference to you, my boy," said Sir Henry, heartily. "That's the only cloud in my sky at this moment. And my wife feels as I do. She began to speak of you as soon as she saw me, and she sent you her love. You must always keep with us Arnold."

"You couldn't do without me, you know." The young man smiled frankly into Sir Henry's face. "I shall have to look after the little lad, and see that he isn't spoiled. Don't talk about clouds, uncle; there's nothing but sunshine to-day." But, although Arnold spoke of sunshine, he was conscious of a certain cloud that hung always over his own life, and made the whole world grey and chill.

As he moved away across the lawn, his uncle followed him with a wistful look which was not often seen on his placid, good-humoured face. The De Wiltons had been made acquainted with the whole story of the imposture; and Rosanne had done her worst for Cherry Dent. Sir Henry and his wife had said very little about the matter in Arnold's presence, for they knew how deep an impression their uninvited guest had made upon his heart. But they were angry with the girl,—not so much for having stolen into their house under a false name, as for winning a love that was not easily won. Deceitful and unworthy as she was, they saw that Arnold was mourning over his dethroned idol as deeply as he had mourned for his dead love.

Here in Heatherdown as in London, the image of Cherry haunted the man who had vowed to banish her from his thoughts for ever. There is no time like spring for awakening half-dead longings, and reviving the suppressed desire for lost companionship; and the sight and perfume of newly-born blossoms made solitude a pain to Arnold de Wilton. Another spring, far distant, perhaps, might find him walking through these violet-scented glades with a fair woman by his side; but it would not be the very woman who had won the first deep love of his life; it would not be the girl whose face had worn the freshness of morning, and her eyes the clearness of the dew. It is certainly good to be off with the old love, even in imagination, before you are on with the new.

While Arnold was going his solitary way through the park, old General Bulstrode was getting on his horse, and riding through the sunshiny lanes to Heatherdown. He was staying with friends in the neighbourhood, and the sound of the joy-bells told him the welcome news, and sent him, post-haste, to congratulate Sir Henry. He found the baronet pacing up and down the terrace, busy with his own pleasant thoughts, and greeted him cheerily.

"I couldn't rest when I heard the bells," he said. "God bless the lad, De Wilton."

Sir Henry returned the old soldier's hand-shake, and answered all his eager questions. And then the general

was persuaded to let his horse be taken to the stables, and stay to luncheon. They did not go into the house, but continued to pace up and down that old stone terrace which had been Cherry's favourite walk. The light shone fresh and strong upon the grey stone work, and the delicate fragrance of spring flowers came floating up from the garden beds below.

"Where is Arnold?" General Bulstrode asked, at length.

"Gone to the home farm. The dear fellow says he shall always stay with us now, and keep our boy in order. I don't like to feel that he is displaced, Bulstrode; it's the only thorn among the roses."

"Well, it can't be helped, you know. And I fancy you feel more about the matter than he does. Arnold is one of the best fellows in the world, but he is rather a queer fellow. He always seems indifferent to the very things that other people want."

"Ah," said Sir Henry, gravely, "I am afraid his indifference has grown of late. Ever since that unscrupulous girl came here he has been a changed man. What a miserable affair it was! I can't understand how Dysart's daughter could have stooped to favour the scheme of an impostor!"

"She was the sweetest impostor I ever saw in my life," remarked the old general, with half a smile. "Of

course it was an annoying thing; but they were a pair of schoolgirls, you know, and quite lost their heads. I never can look upon that business in a serious light."

"It is serious enough to Arnold, I am afraid."

"He can't forget her, can he? I am not surprised. Do you know whether he has tried to see her again?"

"Certainly not. He is thoroughly disgusted. If it had not been for Rosanne Archdale, he would have hunted all over London to find the girl. You can understand what a shock it was to see her face, when he believed she was dead. It was a most cruel shock."

"Of course it was. But I think this Miss Dent, herself, might have been shocked too. It appears she ran away as soon as she saw him."

"Yes; but Rosanne believes that she wanted to work upon him."

"Well, I'm not sure that I should listen to everything that Rosanne says. She always takes the worst view of her own sex, and I know she was jealous of that girl. I used to be amused in watching her. She never would leave her alone with Arnold if she could help it."

"Rosanne had got into the habit of treating Arnold as if he were her own property," Sir Henry replied. "She does not care for many people, but I believe she really is fond of him. And she has behaved very wisely and kindly in this matter."

General Bulstrode saw that it would not do to pursue the subject. But he said, a few minutes later, in an indifferent tone, "Old Rookstone has been calling a good deal on Mrs. Courtney lately. My niece has often met him there."

"Has he?" Sir Henry asked, with some interest.

It was not until after luncheon, when General Bulstrode's horse had been brought round to the terrace steps, and he was saying a few parting words to his host, that he gave him another piece of information.

'Oh, by the way, have you heard that Dysart is coming home? I always thought he would end his days in India but he is tired of it, I suppose. And he is really an old man,—broken down, too, I fancy. Wonderfully rich, you know; his cousin is just dead, and he has come into a lot of money. Sad thing for him, being left alone in his old age."

"Very sad," Sir Henry answered. "My wife never forgets her friendship with Lady Dysart. We shall hope to see him here."

The general rode away, and Sir Henry went back into the house, and sat down in his library to write letters. More than once he paused in his task, and looked round the old oak-panelled room,—at the Chippendale chairs,—the priceless pictures and books,—and the portrait of the last Lady de Wilton hanging over the carved chimney-

piece, just where his eyes could see it best. Leaning back in his chair he gazed long and fixedly at the sweet face that smiled back at him with such gentle eyes. It was worn and faded now—that dear face,—but he loved it as fondly as he had ever done when it was fresh and young.

He remembered how bravely she had striven to hide her grief, while the years went and came, bringing no little child to her bosom. And now the old longing was satisfied; the blessing so long withheld, had been granted to the resigned heart at last. A ray of light, stealing into the dim room, touched the bright tresses that were wound in loose coils round her head, and a verse of a love-song drifted into his mind.

> "And more dear than the gold is the silver
> Grief has sown in that hair's young gold,
> And lovelier than youth is the language
> Of the thoughts that have made youth old."

A mist rose before his eyes, and veiled the sweet face for a moment, for his heart was full of unutterable gratitude and love. He thought of Sir Reginald Dysart, coming from the land of his adoption to the land of his birth, a lonely old man, burdened with great wealth that he must leave to strangers. And he contrasted the emptiness of that life with the fulness of his own.

Meanwhile Arnold was as busy on the estate as if it were to belong to him, instead of that morsel of humanity

whose shrill wail broke the hush of the great silent house. He tramped across water meadows where large yellow kingcups glistened in the sunshine, and through still woods where last year's leaves lay under his feet in brown heaps, and birds sang clear and loud. Once, through an opening in the trees, he caught a sudden glimpse of the Delectable Mountains, bathed in the fresh sunlight, and dappled lightly with cloud-shadows here and there; and he thought of that bygone summer morning when *she* had climbed those heights by his side.

He tried, as he always had tried of late, to put the remembrance of her out of his mind; but it came back oftener than ever that day. As the evening drew on he hoped he had lost the haunting memory, and when he sat talking with his uncle after dinner, and discussing agricultural matters as if there were no other interesting subjects in the world, he really felt quite contented and calm. But suddenly Sir Henry startled him by repeating General Bulstrode's piece of news—Sir Reginald Dysart was coming home from India.

Arnold said little in reply; but a few minutes later he stepped out on the terrace, and stood looking silently at one bright star that hung, large and luminous, over the hills.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"AND THIS IS CISSY'S FRIEND."

ALL through the bright days of the young summer Cherry had worked on uncomplainingly, taking a deep interest in the silks and laces and delicate costumes that were to be worn at flower-shows and garden parties, and inventing several styles that were entirely new. The business was prospering, fresh customers, recommended by old ones, came pouring in, and Effie Comyn never failed to express her warm appreciation of Cherry's valuable help.

As to Cherry herself, she was not unhappy; (no woman ever is unhappy who likes her work;) but she seemed to be living in a very sober and quiet interior world of her own. She was never heard to break into singing, as young girls usually do; her smile came rarely and went swiftly, and although her health had improved, her spirits did not come back. As soon as the season was over, Effie said that they must go away to some

retired country place, and get plenty of fresh air and rest. Effie had great faith in the country; she believed that you could gather balm for wounded hearts in the fields, and drink in hope with every breath of pure air. Perhaps she was right; nature is a great consoler; all the greater because her work of healing goes on as quietly as the dew falls and the grass grows.

Besides the Mornays, Cherry made no new friends. She missed her old governess more than words could say, and longed for the cool shade of the cedars on the college lawn, and the familiar rooms where so many peaceful hours had been spent. But months came and went, and Miss Noel made no sign; and Cherry was too timid to go and plead for pardon. She said to herself that her punishment was just; that it was, strictly speaking, no punishment at all, but only a natural reaping of that which she had sown.

Sometimes she wondered, drearily enough, how she could ever have hoped to escape the consequences of her wrong-doing? She had trusted so implicitly in Cissy, and believed so firmly in her power to set the crooked straight, that she had not used her own judgment at all. Oh, Cissy! If only she could see that dear lost face again—if only she could tell her friend everything, how changed this sad world would be!

June had come nearly to an end, and Effie, in her

spare moments, was always to be seen studying handbooks and gazetteers. She had decided that they would not go to the seaside; Cherry had said that the sea made her sad; and, after all, nothing could be more beautiful than woods and fields. They would start off somewhere before the close of July, and have a thoroughly rural holiday.

It was on a Saturday evening that she fixed at last upon the spot which they were to visit—a Hampshire village, nestling among wooded hills. She spread the map out upon the table and found the place, expatiating all the while upon its charms. And just as Cherry was beginning to take an interest in the plan, and was looking at her friend with grey eyes full of expectation, the servant entered with a letter.

The letter was for Miss Dent.

At the first glance Cherry recognized Miss Noel's familiar handwriting, and seized upon it with a little cry of joy. She tore it open with trembling fingers, read it quickly from beginning to end, and then burst into a sudden storm of tears.

"My Dear Child," it began,—"It has been proved to me, beyond doubt, that you have not been as much to blame as I believed. A great surprise awaits you. You must come to me punctually at three to-morrow afternoon, and you will find me, as in old days,—Your loving friend, Clara Noel."

"I am to go to her!" sobbed Cherry in excess of gladness. "I am to go to dear old Cedar House again. Oh, Effie, I thought I was shut out of the college for ever! But the past is coming back to me."

Effie looked bewildered and troubled.

"I am glad Miss Noel has forgiven you, Cherry, dear," she said tenderly. "But I almost wish you did not cling so passionately to the past. A young girl should look onward."

"Oh, no. I look backward always, always." Cherry's voice was broken and low. "Only Cissy could have spoken in my defence, and she must have spoken! I know not how!"

"Hush, dear," said Effie, with an anxious face. "Remember that Cissy is at rest, and cannot be troubled any more with earthly concerns. It is Miss Noel's own good heart that has spoken in your defence;—or perhaps God has spoken to her, and she has listened. Those things are happening around us every day."

"But no one could defend me, save Cissy."

"Oh, Cherry!" Effie went up to the girl, and put her arms round the trembling figure. "Why need you concern yourself about the way in which things are brought to pass? It is enough for you that the light has come out of the darkness. Rejoice in the light; be grateful for it, and bask in it, my dear!"

It seemed to Cherry that all the sweetness of old summers had come back to her when she entered the college gate again. The house was asleep in the tranquil sunshine; girls in light gowns were clustered under the shade of the great cedars; here and there might be seen a pair of friends, linked arm in arm, strolling away from the rest to exchange heart secrets. Cherry passed by these groups with a thrill of remembrance; and the scent of the white roses came stealing after her as she paused at the hall door.

The door was standing open; and Miss Noel, with a light in her eyes and a flush on her faded cheeks, came to meet her on the threshold. She looked so young in her excitement, and so curiously unlike her usual calm self, that Cherry began to think it was all a dream. She felt as Christiana and Mercy might have felt when they were welcomed into the House Beautiful; and even in that bewildering moment she wondered if one's entrance into heaven would be anything like this? Not a pompous entrance, heralded by trumpets and shawms, but a sweet home-coming, gladdened by familiar voices and well-loved faces; nothing strange or formal at all?

"Cherry," said Miss Noel, holding her back when they had gained the door of her own sanctum; "Cherry, you must be prepared for a surprise. Some one of whom you have often heard, is waiting to see you. Can you

guess his name? It is Sir Reginald Dysart, our dear Cissy's father."

"Cissy's father! Oh, Miss Noel, I am afraid of him!"

She shrank back nervously, but Miss Noel drew her forward with a firm hand.

"You have nothing to fear, dear. He wants to see you and love you for his daughter's sake. I don't know why we all pictured him as a stern man. It is a proof that we are always silly when we paint the portraits of those we have never seen. Come in, Cherry, and be brave!"

So Cherry was led into the well-known room, and saw a tall, thin, old man standing there in the afternoon sunshine. He stooped a little; and his face was deeply bronzed by Indian suns; a heavy white moustache shaded the mouth, but the eyes, although very keen, were soft and kind. Through the open window came clear girl-voices and now and then a sound of laughter; but Cherry only heard the deep tones that trembled when he greeted her.

"And this is Cissy's friend,—her sister-friend!"

He drew her gently towards him, and stood for a moment looking steadfastly at the fair face that could stand the test of the searching sunlight. How beautiful it was! All the more beautiful because the grey eyes pleaded mutely for forgiveness, and the sweet lips

498

SIR REGINALD RECEIVES CHERRY AS HIS ADOPTED DAUGHTER.

quivered. And as he gazed at this girl, in the freshness of her youth and loveliness, he saw what his own daughter might have been, if heaven had given her health and life. The one had been taken and the other left. Left,—to gladden the last days of a lonely old man;—left, to fill his heart with tender hopes and affections instead of the statecraft of which he had grown so tired;—left, to bless him, and be blessed by his care and fatherly love.

"Sit down, my child," he said, leading her to a sofa, and placing himself by her side. "I have a great deal to say; and first of all I must tell you that I know the whole history of your visit to Heatherdown."

"Oh, if you only knew how miserable I have been!" sighed Cherry, her face flushing and paling in an instant. "I don't deserve any one's kindness; but if Cissy had lived ——"

"If she had lived she would have taken the entire blame upon herself," interrupted Sir Reginald, gently. "But she knew that she could not live; and in her last days, when she was on the voyage to a land she was never to see, she wrote a full confession of the plot. That letter, written to me by my dear child, was given me by Mrs. Hope, after her death. You shall read it Cherry; it is a very long letter, but it will only tell you all that you know already. My daughter's love for you was the

strongest feeling she had ever known; for your sake she clung to the hope of life, and dreamed of having you with her always in India. She did not know me;—poor girl! she had never learnt to love me."

He stopped; and again the sound of girl-voices filled up the pause;—voices clear and sweet as hers whose tones were still. And at that moment it seemed to Cherry that it was impossible for her to have passed away. If Cissy,—the fair, fragile Cissy, in her summer dress,—had come and smiled at them through the open window, it would scarcely have appeared strange at all.

"She gave me a detailed account of the scheme from beginning to end," he went on. "She confessed that she had planned it partly because her life was dull, and she wanted something in the shape of an adventure or a romance. Everything, she declared, was thought of and arranged by herself; and at the last you were so unwilling to play your part, that it was only the sheer force of her will that swept you on. You hung back, and entreated that the design might be given up; but she would not listen."

"It is true," whispered Cherry, with tears.

"I know that it is true. But when Cissy felt that death was drawing near, she saw the wrong that she had done. She felt that she was called away, and that you would be left to bear all the consequences of that girlish

folly alone. Some of those consequences she seems faintly to have foreseen; she divined,—perhaps from your letters, my child,—that young De Wilton was deeply interested in the supposed Miss Dysart."

Again he paused; and Cherry spoke quietly, with intense sorrow and humility in her voice.

"That also is true. But he knows now that he was basely deceived; and he has either forgotten me, or thinks of me only with contempt."

"He shall not think of you any longer with contempt," said Sir Reginald calmly. "And now tell me about yourself. Cissy has left you to me as a legacy, you see; and I want to know all that concerns my new possession."

She described to him, simply and straightforwardly enough, the kind of life that she was living in South Molton Street; and he heard her with patience and attention. And when she ceased speaking, he exchanged a smile with Miss Noel, who sat in silence at the other end of the room.

"Cherry," he asked, "do you like South Molton Street better than Cedar House?"

"No," she answered with a little sigh. "Cedar House is my true home, and no other place will ever seem as dear. But I always knew that I could not stay here."

"You can stay here now, my dear, as long as you please;—that is, until other arrangements are made for

your future. You look astonished, Cherry! Did I not tell you, a few minutes ago, that Cissy had left you to me? And do you think that I shall let my adopted daughter earn her own bread?"

But Cherry was too much bewildered and overwhelmed to take in the fact of this change in her circumstances. Miss Noel wisely came to her aid, and led her away upstairs, and into that pleasant old room which she had once shared with her lost friend.

And then, while they sat together at the familiar window, the kind woman did her best to soothe the girl's agitation, and make all Sir Reginald's intentions plain. He had come home from India with a fixed idea in his mind, and had hastened to the College to lay his plans before Miss Noel; and his first words had filled her with thankfulness and joy. She had felt, more than once, that she must write to Cherry, and assure her of her forgiveness; and now she knew that there was less to forgive than she had thought.

"He wants you to come back to me for a time, Cherry," she said, "and then you can take up all the accomplishments that you have laid aside. You will not mind coming to school again for a little while? Miss Grain shall not worry you, and I will not forget that you are grown up. What do you say, dear? Will you come?"

Cherry gave her answer with her head on Miss Noel's

shoulder; and thus, for some minutes, they sat in silence. The old perfume came up from the white roses down below; the sunbeams played upon the dark, velvety foliage of the cedars; and Cherry watched the snowy clouds flecking the blue summer sky, and thought how little the world had changed since Cissy went away from it! Dear Cissy,—faithful Cissy,—who had been true to her promise to the very last!

CHAPTER XL.

CONCLUSION.

IT was a September morning, sweet and still, and the sunshine was making its way brightly through the French windows of a pretty cottage. The flower-beds in the little garden were aglow with scarlet geraniums, bees kept up a loud humming, and the silver gleam of old Father Thames could be seen between the trees. It was one of those mornings when it is a sin to stay indoors; and yet a young man, healthy and strong, had deliberately turned his back upon the open windows, and was standing with his eyes fixed upon a large photograph, framed, and hanging on the wall.

It was a portrait of a girl; a soft oval face, three quarter, showing one pretty ear, and the delicate line of the cheek to the chin. The head was bent slightly forward, and the loose hair came rippling in short locks low over the forehead. In the eyes, uplifted, and in the soft

curves of the perfect lips, there was an indescribable wistfulness,—a mute entreaty for forgiveness, which few could behold unmoved. The man who stood looking at it so earnestly was by no means untouched by the silent pleading of the face, and his cheek grew paler and paler as he gazed. A hand was laid lightly on his shoulder, and he turned away from the picture with a start.

"Come, Arnold," said Mr. Mornay briskly, "it won't do to waste any more of this lovely morning, you know. I told the Warners I would take you there after breakfast, and they will be looking out for you."

Colonel Warner and his wife had lately returned from India, and were old friends of the De Wiltons. And when Arnold had accepted the Mornays' invitation to spend a few days with them, in a cottage by the river, they had said that the Warners were their neighbours. The colonel was spending the summer in an old house which had sheltered many a dead-and-gone celebrity, and was regarded by excursionists as a show place. But Arnold did not feel any interest in show places, nor did he care very much to begin an acquaintance with the Warners, although they were family friends, whose name was quite familiar to him.

Perhaps, if he had been placed in the Palace of Truth, he would have owned that he did not, just at that time, care very much about anything in life. People all bored him

more or less, and he bored people in his turn. The Mornays, of course, knew all about his secret miseries, and took him under their protection because it was their mission to watch over the troubled ones of earth. His first glance at Cherry's portrait had led to his questioning Mr. Mornay; and then he found how harshly he had judged the girl whom he had never ceased to love. He would have gone to her, after that talk with the clergyman, if she had been in her old place in South Molton Street. But, no sooner had Mr. Mornay put the matter before Arnold in the right light, than a letter came to Dora Mornay from Cherry herself, telling her of Sir Reginald's return, and her own altered circumstances. And then, too, there came unexpected epistles from Heatherdown, announcing Sir Reginald's intention of adopting his daughter's beloved friend. And poor Cissy's last letter was forwarded to Arnold by Sir Reginald's special request.

So a sudden turn of the wheel had reversed the positions of these two; the one who was down had gone up; and the one who was up, had gone down; and they were as far apart as ever.

The little heir was thriving and flourishing at Heatherdown; and Arnold was beginning, in a dull fashion, to realize that a man with only six hundred a year, and no baronetcy in prospect, is not looked upon by his acquaint-

ances as a very fine fellow. But that which he felt most keenly was the way in which people talked about Cherry and her story. They made a romance of it, and exalted her into a heroine, and begged that Lady de Wilton would let them have one glimpse of that dear original girl's photograph. Lady de Wilton had, as we know, no portrait of Cherry in her possession, and the talk about Miss Dent disgusted and wearied her. She was quite willing to own that Cissy's confession had thrown a new light upon an unpleasant affair; but in her mind the unpleasantness still remained. Sir Reginald might adopt the girl, and make her an heiress, but she would never be the real Cissy Dysart, the daughter of Lady de Wilton's old friend.

Lady Rosanne Archdale had astonished the De Wiltons by becoming Lady Rookstone at the end of the season. Sir Henry, for one, did not feel very kindly disposed towards her. He had begun to see that there had been some sense in old General Bulstrode's remarks, and that Rosanne had done no good in branding Miss Dent as an impostor. If the matter had been let alone, Sir Reginald, on his return, would have set everything right in his own way; and then the supposed Miss Dysart might have been welcomed anew in her real character. But now that the mask had been so roughly torn off by Rosanne, there was little hope that the girl would ever set foot in Heatherdown again.

As to Arnold, he was quite convinced of the utter impossibility of approaching the rich and beautiful Miss Dent. She was still very young; she was to come out next year; and it was confidently predicted that she would be the chief *belle*. And her origin,—what did that weigh, when Sir Reginald's wealth and station, and her own remarkable charms were in the other scale? Moreover, Arnold felt that she might misunderstand his motives if he were to seek her now.

And this was how matters stood on that September morning when Arnold was gazing at the portrait of his lost love. Mr. Mornay's friend had photographed Cherry in those sad days gone past, and the sadness would always remain stamped upon her lovely face.

"Come," repeated Mr. Mornay. "There are Dora and Lucilla waiting for us on the lawn."

The little lawn went sloping down to the low wall that divided it from the riverside path. They walked along this narrow path almost in silence, for September had laid them under its languid spell; and the voices that came drifting across the river sounded faint and sweet. The air was heavy with the perfume of flowers, and once a warm breath of wind sent a cloud of jasmine blossoms over the way.

Presently they stopped at an iron gate, and then passed through a dense shrubbery into a quaint old garden.

498

CHERRY AND ARNOLD MEET ONCE MORE.

There are many such gardens by the Thames;—gardens that seem to have undergone little change since the days when the ladies, whom Sir Joshua loved to paint, swept along the paths in thick silk gowns; and men in knee-breeches and buckled shoes went philandering with them among the lavender and roses. A turn in one of the winding walks brought them suddenly upon a river-god, pouring a stream of sparkling water out of his urn. Arnold stopped to look at the weather-beaten features of the statue, and thought that it returned his gaze with a smile, half mischievous and half benevolent;—just the kind of smile that one would have expected from a freakish water-spirit. The head was crowned fantastically with leaves and grasses, wrought in the grey stone, and around the dripping limbs a slender climbing plant had twined its tendrils, freshly green. The quietness of this spot was intense; not a bee hummed, not a bird chirped; only the musical plash of the fountain broke the silence. Arnold turned to speak to his companions, but they had vanished. He and the river-god were left alone together.

Then a low rustle caught his ears, and down a narrow path, between hedges of clipped yew, came a woman, tall and beautiful, her bright hair shining in the morning sun. She was so quaintly dressed that she seemed to harmonize with the surrounding scene. Her gown was faintly tinted

with blue; a kerchief of yellowish muslin was tied loosely across her shoulders, and at her breast there was a bunch of roses and mignonette. She came towards him slowly, and then paused; and a blush spread suddenly over her face.

"Cherry," he said, holding out his hands. "Can it be really Cherry?"

He called her by the name that she had thought he would hate. But he had uttered it as if he loved its very sound. Cherry, herself, had often dreamed of this meeting; and in her dreams there had always been a slight haughtiness—many explanations,—an understanding achieved after much had been said on both sides. But the real meeting was a very different thing to the dream. No one knew what was said or done; no one, save the old river-god who looked on and smiled upon the two who had come together at last.

THE END.

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